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The Postmodernist Art  
in Muriel Spark's  
Fiction

斯帕克的后现代主义小说艺术

戴鸿斌 著



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## 序

本书的作者戴鸿斌 2009 年 6 月毕业于上海外国语大学,其博士学位论文经过一年多的认真修改,即将以专著的形式出版。这是作者第一本独立撰写的学术专著。作为他的博士论文导师,我颇感欣慰,因为这是戴鸿斌学术生涯的新起点。相信本书的面世将会进一步激发他的学术兴趣和潜能,成为他继续努力前行的动力。

当代女作家斯帕克在英国文坛享有盛誉,曾经三次入围布克奖的提名,并且获得各种大奖。她得到著名文论家克莫德和大卫·洛奇等人的高度评价,被称为是“她那一代作家中最有魅力的”小说家。她的作品已被翻译成二十多种语言,在全世界广泛流传。有关斯帕克的研究成果在国外层出不穷,但她的作品在国内并未得到应有的关注。因此,戴鸿斌选择该作家作为研究对象具有一定的实践意义和理论价值。

关于斯帕克的阵营归属问题——现实主义、现代主义或后现代主义——向来是学界争论的焦点。其实,每个小说家在创作时都很难在主题思想、表现手法和人物刻画等方面与某一阵营的特征完全吻合。况且,随着作家创作历程的延伸,作品数量的增多,他的创作也可能带有不同阵营的特征。因此,本书作者并没有简单地把斯帕克归入某一阵营,而是从她创作技巧的角度出发,以具体的小说艺术理论,即互文性、新小说及元小说理论为指导,以文本细读为基础,借鉴前人的研究成果,对代表其主要创作阶段的三部小说进行了深入系统的研究,令人信服地论证了这样一个重要观点:就艺术手法而言,斯帕克的小说创作具有明显的后现代主义倾向。本书的研究范围仅限于三部小说和三种技巧,目的在于通过详细的文本解读来揭示每种技巧的典型性。此外,如果论及更多的小说和技巧,虽然可能

显得较为全面,但限于篇幅,那样会流于空泛肤浅,得不偿失。

从后现代主义小说的创作技巧层面来探讨斯帕克的小说是本书的一个亮点。对于斯帕克的作品与其他后现代主义作品的共性与差异的判断也显示出作者在斯帕克研究问题上的洞察力和独到见解;而对于斯帕克与其他当代作家的影响和被影响关系的论述则恰如其分地印证了她在当今英国文坛上的地位和作用。

戴鸿斌是一位忠厚实在的年轻学者,一贯虚心好学,勤于思考,现在厦门大学执教英国文学课程。他对英国当代小说始终具有浓厚的研究兴趣。考博之前,他就开始关注一些英国著名的当代小说家。在“上外”求学期间,他进一步收集并阅读了各种资料,经过充分准备和不断斟酌,最终选定了斯帕克作为研究对象,并全力以赴,在较短的时间内完成了博士论文的撰写,在文中提出了一些独到见解和创新观点。他在论文答辩时应答自如,发挥出色,令人满意地回答了答辩委员会成员的问题,既体现了他对斯帕克作品的透彻理解,也体现了他的理论功底和学术潜力。他的博士论文得到答辩委员会的一致好评。毕业后,戴鸿斌根据评委的建议继续对论文修改润色、充实调整,终于完成了书稿。

相对于同时代的英国女作家莱辛和默多克,斯帕克在我国尚未引起足够的关注和重视,许多读者甚至还没听过她的名字。《斯帕克的后现代主义小说技巧》一书不仅能增进读者对斯帕克的了解,而且也能提高学者对她的研究兴趣。我认为,本书对国内的研究具有一定的参考价值,并能推进国内斯帕克研究的发展。在此书即将面世之际,我衷心希望作者戴鸿斌能够再接再厉,一如既往地勤奋好学,刻苦钻研,并在学术上取得更加卓越的成就。

李维屏

2011 年元月

于上海外国语大学

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## Introduction

In her long life, Muriel Spark (1918—2006) pursued a lot of literary disciplines, acting as an editor, critic, poet, dramatist, short story writer and novelist. In a short-story competition held by *The Observer Magazine* in 1951, Muriel Spark won, out of 6,700 entries, with her story “The Seraph and the Zambesi”, which seemed to be her first main step toward literary prominence. But it was not until 1957 that she became widely known in the literary circles for the success of her first novel *The Comforters*. Shortly after its appearance, *Yale Review* hailed it and noted in it “the brilliant ingenuities of Gide.”<sup>①</sup> In 1988, Dorothea Walker claimed: “that Muriel Spark is a celebrated writer is attested by the abundance of critical comment as well as by her popular success. Each new novel is a literary event.”<sup>②</sup> What is special about Spark is that she began her novel writing at the age of 39, a time considered rather late for a novelist. However, before she died in 2006 at the age of 88, in addition to numerous other works, she had altogether produced 22 novels, each of which achieves popular success and engages a lot of attention.

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① Cf. George Greene, “A Reading of Muriel Spark,” *Thought* 43 (Autumn 1968): 393.

② Dorothea Walker, Preface, *Muriel Spark* (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1988)

Muriel Spark is so brilliant and her novels deal with so many subjects that she has been compared with many famous writers, such as Evelyn Waugh, Graham Greene, William Golding, Samuel Beckett, Iris Murdoch, and A. S. Byatt. Her work has been extremely popular: in Britain, her every novel and short story collection remain in print; in the United States, New Directions Press has begun to reprint most of her novels: Spark's readership spans the globe, with her works translated into twenty-six or so languages. Her works are popular in Germany, France, America, England, Scotland and so on. Many of her novels have been adapted for the stage, film, and television. She won numerous honors and awards, including Prix Italia, Yorkshire Post Book of the Year Award, the James Tait Black Prize, the Ingersoll T. S. Eliot Award, and the David Cohen British Literary Prize for Lifetime Achievement. As a result, her works have been the subject of much serious discussion and commentary. In 1969, she was already on the short list for Booker McConnell Prize which was granted for the first time in history. In 1981, she was again nominated for Booker McConnell Prize for *Loitering with Intent*. In 1993 she was made a Dame Commander of the British Empire, and six years later, she received an honorary degree from the University of Oxford, to add to those already bestowed by the University of Strathclyde, St Andrew's and Edinburgh.

Besides gaining innumerable literary prizes and academic awards, Spark engaged the favorable attention of distinguished critics like Velma Bourgeois Richard, Frank Kermode, W. H. Auden, Anita Brookner, David Lodge, and John Updike. In "The Darkening Vision of Muriel Spark", Velma Bourgeois Richard comments that "often described as heir to Evelyn Waugh and Graham Greene, Muriel Spark



is one of today's most prolific Catholic writers.”<sup>①</sup> In 1996, Frank Kermode regarded Spark as one of the “most engaging, most tantalising”<sup>②</sup> writers of her generation. On another occasion, David Lodge describes Muriel Spark as “the most gifted and innovative British writer of her generation.”<sup>③</sup> Despite Lodge's sensational overstatement, the compliment at least shows his appreciation of Spark and it may represent some people's opinions. It is no exaggeration to say that Muriel Spark occupies a significant place in contemporary British literature and even world literature, as Bryan Cheyette justly declares: “she has also genuinely extended the possibilities of the contemporary novel. Deceptively ‘minor’ in her use of literary sub-genres and the comic form, she is rightly regarded by many as the most gifted and innovative British novelist of her generation.”<sup>④</sup>

The author of the dissertation ventures to devote his research to Spark's writings from the perspective of her postmodernist techniques. By probing into the art of fiction in Muriel Spark's novels, the author intends to prove that Spark's creations show the postmodernist tendency as far as her art of fiction is concerned, though there are a variety of disagreements as to which category Spark is supposed to fall into—realist, modernist, or postmodernist. So far, critics abroad have undertaken various studies on her from different perspectives.

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① Velma Bourgeois Richmond, “The Darkening Vision of Muriel Spark,” *Critique: Studies in Modern Fiction* 15.1 (1973): 71.

② Frank Kermode, “A Turn of Events,” *London Review of Books* 14 November 1996: 23-24.

③ Robert Hosmer, “An Interview with Dame Muriel Spark,” *Salmagundi* 146/147 (Spring 2005): 127.

④ Bryan Cheyette, *Muriel Spark* (Horndon: Northcote House Publishers Ltd., 2000) 20.

Nevertheless, in China, there has been scarce study on this prominent writer. People at home or abroad have seldom explored Spark's postmodernist art. Thereby, it is consequential for researchers in China to devote some attention to her, especially from the vantage point of her postmodernist art. In the present dissertation, the author adopts the theories with regard to the art of fiction in the postmodernist context, namely the theories concerning the techniques of intertextuality, the nouveau roman and metafiction. The intention of the author is based on and inspired by a comprehensive survey of Spark criticism both at home and abroad.

Just as there are numerous novels and other works by Spark, critical books and articles on her works and life are also abundant. By the year 2002, about 20 monographs on Spark criticism had been published. Also, there are many doctoral dissertations on her works. The first monograph titled *Muriel Spark* by Derek Stanford came out in 1963. It is only a thin book of biographical and critical study on Spark and it mainly deals with Stanford's recollection of Spark's life as poet, short story writer, novelist and critic. Some anecdotes are included. But Muriel Spark once expressed her dissatisfaction with the book in an interview, noting that the book is not objective enough for it contains some anecdotes fabricated by Stanford. The next book, with the same title of *Muriel Spark* by Karl Malkoff, is a very thin one of 48 pages. Chronologically, it briefly introduces Spark's novels and short stories from *The Comforters* to the latest one titled *The Public Image*, which was written in 1968 when Malkoff finished this monograph. In addition to the two monographs, there appeared *The Sense of an Ending* (1966) by Frank Kermode which contains some influential readings of Muriel Spark. In the 1970s, only three books with the same title of *Muriel Spark* were published, respectively by Patricia Stubbs in 1973, Peter

Kemp in 1974 and Allan Massie in 1979. Among them, Patricia Stubbs' book merely contains 35 pages and gives a rather brief introduction to the novels from *The Comforters* up to *The Mandelbaum Gate* which was first published in 1965. The monograph by Allan Massie is also fairly thin with less than 100 pages and deals with three more novels, namely *The Hothouse by the East River* (1973), *The Abbess of Crewe* (1974) and *The Takeover* (1976). By comparison, Peter Kemp's work is much more comprehensive and covers more novels. It is comprised of six chapters, and treats six topics: "economic sources," "islands," "the metropolitan city," "times past," "tense present," and "future conditional." What distinguishes the book is that the author ingeniously categorizes the novels according to their time of publication into each chapter. In this monograph, there are some original readings of Muriel Spark's novels.

Since the 1980s, the study on Muriel Spark has flourished. More scholars have approached Spark's works from diverse perspectives, which results in more than ten monographs and collections. Though some of them are largely unreadable owing to the abstruse ideas and grotesque logic—such as Joseph Hynes' *The Art of the Real: Muriel Spark's Novels* (1988), and Rodney Stenning Edgcombe's *Vocation and Identity in the Fiction of Muriel Spark* (1990)—most books contain interesting ideas or suggestive and useful views. Special attention should be paid to Martin McQuillan's collection titled *Theorizing Muriel Spark: Gender, Psychoanalysis, Deconstruction* (2002) for the contributors are all very famous—such as Hélène Cixous, Bryan Cheyette, and Julian Wolfreys who have already authored many books—and it is the "first sustained attempt to engage

with Muriel Spark's work in a theoretically sophisticated manner.”<sup>①</sup> As the title suggests, the edited book contains different contributors' articles under the category of gender, race and deconstruction. In other words, all the articles are written from one of those three perspectives. The book includes an interview with Spark in November 1998 and 12 articles commenting on Spark's works ranging from short stories and biographies to some of her fiction like *Not to Disturb* (1971), *The Public Image* (1968), and *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie* (1961). In 2000, Bryan Cheyette published her monograph titled *Muriel Spark* aiming to “focus on her playful and anarchic fiction, which disrupts the certainties of her supposedly stable identity as a ‘Catholic writer’.”<sup>②</sup> The monograph deals with Spark's short stories and almost all of her novels except *The Finishing School* published in 2004, from *The Comforters* (1957) to *Aiding and Abetting* (2000).

Jennifer Lynn Randisi's *On Her Way Rejoicing: The Fiction of Muriel Spark* (1991) deals with Spark's novels from a special perspective of religion, but it merely treats Spark as a Catholic writer. *The Women of Muriel Spark* (1992) by Judy Sproxtton classifies Spark's women characters into three groups: the mature woman, women of power, and women as victims, and discusses women characters in fourteen of Spark's fictions, concluding that “the characters discussed above are all victims in very different situations. However, they are all, and Lise exceptionally, complicit in their victimization.”<sup>③</sup> In 1992, Joseph Hynes published his compilation of

① Ibid. 144.

② Ibid. xi.

③ Judy Sproxtton, *The Women of Muriel Spark* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1992) 143.

articles under the title of *Critical Essays on Muriel Spark*. The book contains three parts under three categorizations of “Muriel Spark about herself”, “different comments on Spark”, and “the critical mainstream”, respectively including four articles by Muriel Spark on herself, six articles whose authors “misunderstood and misevaluated Spark”<sup>①</sup>, and eighteen essays in favor of Spark reviewing her fiction like *The Only Problem* (1984) and *A Far Cry from Kensington* (1988) as well as *Symposium* (1990).

As far as the author of the dissertation knows, five doctoral dissertations on Muriel Spark appeared, all in the 1970s, among which Jacqueline Ann Jones' *The Absurd in the Fiction of Muriel Spark* (1974) seems to be the best organized and fairly insightful. The author, after carefully examining twelve of Spark's novels, argues that the main issue in Muriel Spark's novels is the absurd that Camus outlines in *The Myth of Sisyphus* (1942). Another dissertation titled *A Theology of Juxtaposition: Muriel Spark as a Catholic Comic Novelist* (1977) by Joanne Parnell Mongeon closely examines all Spark's novels and critical articles on her until the time the dissertation gets finished and, believing that Spark adds a transcendence to the contemporary novel, concludes that “Muriel Spark, in her juxtaposition of the Catholic and the comic, is like the juggler of an old Christian folk tale who uses his talent to give glory to God.”<sup>②</sup> *Another World than This* by Joseph Gerard Mansfield in 1973 analyzes Spark's novels from the perspective of the gothic and Catholic features.

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① Joseph Hynes, ed, *Critical Essays on Muriel Spark* (New York: G. K. Hall & Co., 1992) 5.

② Joanne Parnell Mongeon, “A Theology of Juxtaposition: Muriel Spark as a Catholic Comic Novelist,” Ph. D. Diss., University of Rhode Island, 1977, 212.

Besides monographs, collections and doctoral dissertations, there are numerous reviews and journal articles on Spark, which deal with her short stories, some specific novel or a major subject concerning some novels. The most often discussed novel is *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie*, with which novel Spark's fame mainly lies. Among the articles, the most remarkable research seemed to appear in the journal *Modern Fiction Studies* in the year 2008. The whole issue containing 9 articles, namely the third issue of the 54<sup>th</sup> volume, of this renowned academic journal, is devoted to the study of Muriel Spark from the perspectives of religion, nationality, identity, styles, arts, bibliography concerning her works, etc. Earlier, whenever one of Spark's new novels appears, famous newspapers as well as magazines—such as *Times Literary Supplement*, *Times*, *Listener*—would publish a variety of reviews or articles on it, quite often by prestigious critics, such as Frank Kermode, David Lodge, Malcolm Bradbury, or Bernard Harrison. In general, critics have treated primarily with the following issues in Spark's works: religion, the supernatural, the conflict between good and evil, the issue of order and chaos and her fictional art.

Since the focus of the dissertation is Spark's postmodernist art, the critical survey will cover her fictional art instead of elaborating on the other issues. In fact, only a few critics have done research and made comments on Spark's fictional art. Randall Stevenson, after discussing the concern of Burgess, Golding and Murdoch with good and evil, declares that Muriel Spark shares with them the same concern with the issue, but "she is also committed, simultaneously and often much more firmly, to experiment in technique."<sup>①</sup>

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① Randall Stevenson, *The British Novel since the Thirties: An Introduction* (Athens: Univ. of Georgia Press, 1986) 182.

For some critics, the most conspicuous characteristic of her fictional art is her manipulation of the time sequence. In his “The Uses and Abuses of Omniscience: Method and Meaning in Muriel Spark’s *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie*”, David Lodge compares Spark’s time shifts with “the omniscience of God, who alone knows the beginning and the end” (122). He devotes a full chapter to Spark’s use of time shifts in *The Art of Fiction* (1992) and draws the conclusion that “Muriel Spark’s combination of frequent time-shift with authorial third-person narrative is a typical postmodernist strategy, calling attention to the artificial construction of the text, and preventing us from ‘losing ourselves’ in the temporal continuum of the fictional story or in the psychological depth of the central character.”<sup>①</sup> In an article, Frank Kermode also explores Spark’s handling of time sequence and explains that giving off the end of a story just at the beginning “will help to explain the nature of fictions, the kind of relation we may expect them to have to truth.”<sup>②</sup>

Critics also mention Spark’s detachment from her characters, the art of satire and irony, regarding them as showing the postmodernist features. John Updike thinks highly of Spark’s detachment in the fiction, saying that it is the “genius of her fiction.”<sup>③</sup> Baldanza thinks that “Mrs. Spark’s satire consists, then, of an amused and detached observation of vice and folly, in which the author herself espouses no clearly discerned, systematic set of values”<sup>④</sup>. Jennifer Lynn Randisi, in

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① David Lodge, *The Art of Fiction* (London: Penguin Books, 1992) 77.

② Frank Kermode, “Foreseeing the Unforeseen,” *Listener* 11 Nov. 1971: 657.

③ John Updike, “Creatures of the Air,” *New Yorker* 30 Sept. 1961: 161.

④ Frank Baldanza, “Muriel Spark and the Occult,” *Wisconsin Studies in Contemporary Literature* 6.2 (Summer 1965): 202.

her *On Her Way Rejoicing: The Fiction of Muriel Spark* (1991), claims that Spark's novels are lodged within satire and Catholicism and that satire illuminates her faith just as faith informs her satire.<sup>①</sup> With regard to the topic of satire, Ian Gregson regards Spark as much less interested than most contemporary novelists in intimate relationships, and much more drawn to interactions between characters which arise in professional contexts where careers are at stake, arguing that "this set of Sparkian priorities reflects the preoccupation with power which has led her to adopt satire as her dominant mode."<sup>②</sup>

When talking about the fictional art, some critics notice the postmodernist trend in Spark's fiction creation, but they usually disagree on which category she belongs to: realism, modernism, or postmodernism. Alan Bold claims that

Roman Catholic by conversion and poetic by inclination, Spark subscribes to the aesthetic religion of modernism, uses her verbal material ritualistically to create an atmosphere in which events do not occur according to a conventional sequential logic but appear to satisfy the author's imaginative needs.<sup>③</sup>

When commenting on postmodernist fiction in English, the famous postmodernist critic Douwe Fokkema says that Spark is one of the typical postmodernist writers who was recognized at an early time. He then lists Spark's *The Comforters*, *The Driver's Seat* and *The Hothouse by the East River* as characteristic postmodernist fiction between roughly

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① Jennifer Lynn Randisi, *On Her Way Rejoicing: The Fiction of Muriel Spark* (Washington, D. C.: The Catholic University Press, 1991) 19.

② Ian Gregson, "Muriel Spark's Caricatural Effects," *Essays in Criticism* 55. 1 (Jan. 2005): 2. Further references in this chapter will be cited in the text.

③ Alan Bold, *Muriel Spark* (London: Methuen Co. Ltd, 1986) 30.



1960 and 1980.<sup>①</sup> Judy Little admits that in Spark's works, there are some postmodern elements, claiming that though her career as a novelist began in the fifties, an era dominated by realism in fiction, her novels often make use of the devices of the important—though less prominent—element of experimental, non-realistic writing present in the works of writers like Golding, Durrell.<sup>②</sup> Page, however, has a different opinion on the influence Spark receives and the group she is related to, not deciding on which category she falls into:

She acknowledges and owes few literary debts and belongs to no school, group or movement; there's no one quite like her, and one rereads her novels in the hope of coming a little closer to their meaning and in the certainty of repeated pleasure—as Fleur Talbot says at the end of *Loitering with Intent*, “from there by the grace of God I go on my way rejoicing.”<sup>③</sup>

Herman argues that Spark “established early on the strikingly *sui generis* style that became the hallmark of her fiction—a style combining a self-reflexive focus on novelistic technique, including modes of metafictional play, with a probing investigation of the moral, psychological, and institutional dimension of human conduct.”<sup>④</sup> In the same essay, Herman declares that Spark opts out of the two responses to modernism that David Lodge has called antimodernism represented by Kingsley Amis as well as Evelyn Waugh and postmodernism represented by Samuel Beckett and John Barth. He argues that Spark

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① Cf. Hans Bertens, and Douwe Fokkema, eds., *International Postmodernism* (Amsterdam: John Benjamins Publishing Company, 1997) 29.

② Judy Little, *Comedy and the Woman Writer: Woolf, Spark and Feminism* (Lincoln: Nebraska Press, 1983) 1.

③ Norman Page, *Muriel Spark* (London: Macmillan, 1990) 121.

④ David Herman, “‘A Salutory Scar’: Muriel Spark’s Desegregated Art in the Twenty-First Century,” *Modern Fiction Studies* 54.3 (Fall 2008): 474.