CHAPTER – 2

Social Realism in Spark’s novels: A comparative study of the ‘Great Tradition’ and departures from it

Before studying the theme of ‘Social Realism' in Spark's novels, an attempt is made here to take a bird's eye view of the tradition of social realism in English novels; with a view to place Muriel Spark in that tradition and also to show her difference and individuality from the tradition. An attempt is made here to analyze broadly some prominent authors of the tradition of social realism in English novels, along with the seemingly exceptions to the tradition, to get an overall snapshot of all sides of this tradition for a better picture of it.

Social Realism in English novels:-

If we try to trace the history of English novels, we can find that there is a long tradition of social realism in them. The prominent point of narration in most of them, is a depiction of society or broadly we can say, English society of their times. But what exactly this social realism means for them cannot be defined in concrete terms. It depends on their perception of society and their choice of issues which they deal with, in their respective novels. The social realism in novels broadly means the depiction of problems and realities of society through the life-stories of
their characters in an authentic or true-to-life manner. But the extent to which these novelists stick to the realities of society or the area travelled by them in pursuit of social realism, is not same in each case. In many cases, this social realism seems to be, much ambivalent, in some cases, it is deep but incomplete and only in few cases, it encompasses all experiences in real sense. A short review of some important novelists of English tradition, can throw more light on this argument. This will also prove Spark’s exact standing in this tradition of great novelists of English fiction.

On one side of the history, we find that the social realism of the novelists till end of 19th century was mostly connected to the problems of social interaction, that is, dealing with others. Social reality for them, to most extent was how to deal with others in correct moral manner and prosper in the society! Gaining back the lost wealth, marrying a prosperous groom or finding a virtuous bride; this is where most of those novels end. The complexities of human life, the enigmatic psychological problems, were all beyond their canvas. Some like Dickens portrayed the political and social evils, but his pictures were limited. Overall, though these novelists depicted social realism, it was mostly connected to the surface social realities.

We can take the first example of Samuel Richardson, with whom, novel as a form, flourished in England. His 'Pamela' or 'Virtue Rewarded',...
published in 1740, is considered to be the first modern English 'novel of character'. *Pamela* is the story of a sentimental but shrewd young woman who, by prudently safeguarding her chastity, succeeds in becoming the wife of a wild young gentleman instead of becoming a debauched servant girl. The novel ends happily with the ringing of a marriage bell. The virtues of a lady are shown as rewarded by her marriage to a wealthy young gentleman, as if marriage is the ultimate solution to all problems. In his next novel *Clarissa*, Richardson narrates in a similar sentimental way, a story of a beautiful young lady and her passions and mistakes leading to a tragic end.

Richardson's novels are sentimental novels. He brought the wave of sentimentalism in Europe by his novels. He is known for his art of characterization, which is noteworthy; otherwise, to a modern reader, he is unendurably prolix. His lengthy novels and its melodramatic and sentimental episodes are wearisome. He portrays the society, but doesn't go deeper into the realities of social life or of the individual's mind. He often moralizes and his moralizing seems to be an embodiment of the religious earnestness of the rising puritan middle class. The virtue he advocates is typically utilitarian and its reward is material prosperity. Thus, Pamela marries her wicked master and prospers in the world ironically as a direct reward for her virtue.
Henry Fielding another important novelist of 18th century has many similarities with Richardson. 'Joseph Andrews', 'Jonathan Wild' and 'Tom Jones' are his famous novels. Fielding is known for his humour, satire and his art of characterization. His characters are life like and real, depicting his experiences of the world. But he too, is a moralist. Many times, his writing seems to be biased with the views of his moral philosophy, or the ideal manners of the English society of his time, to the modern reader. Though, he depicts society, in many aspects, his pictures do not seem to penetrate the harsh realities of life openly. His realism is of a moderate quality and does not go to the extent of a bitter preference for the cruel truths which convention neglects. His realism and irony are softened by the warmth of his human sympathy and his preference for the surface issues of society, rather than the deep-rooted problems of human existence.

Richardson and Fielding, whatever their merits and demerits had been; they are the founders of modern English novel. They began the tradition of 'realism' in English fiction. Both had many followers and those writers followed them in technique and theme both. Social realism became a prominent quality of a novel as a form in future and the convention still continues.

In the same convention, we find Oliver Goldsmith, a typical 18th century novelist. His 'Vicar of Wakefield' appeals more to the heart than to
the head. The strength of the novel lies in the characterization of the Vicar and his two daughters, Olivia and Sophia. It is a simple story, showing the author's belief in domestic bliss and tranquillity, his trust in life and the eternal goodness of the world. These morals are reinforced and so the novel, like a fairy tale, despite all hardships and sufferings, ends happily, with three marriages, of Vicar's two daughters and one son. It is full of humour and pathos, a specialty of 18th century novels.

This tradition was enriched and developed to a greater extent by Jane Austen, one of the milestones of English fiction tradition. F.R. Leavis begins his list of ‘Great Tradition’ of English novelists with Jane Austen. She established the tradition of social realism in English fiction. She portrays the scenes from Southern England where she had spent a considerable period of her life and writes about the upper middle class, as this was the only class that she knew. Still her restraint is commendable, because she tries to be realistic about her books and excludes from them all aspects of life that cannot pass through the canvas of her imagination.

The strength of the novels of Jane Austen is in her simple domestic pictures of life, her craftsmanship in plot construction, her style and her minutely portrayed characters. She is a satirist as well as a moralist. But she limited herself to the manners and ethics of a typical English society. It was ideal for her and the same she presented through her novels. She believes in taste, sense and virtue and likes sensible persons of good
breeding who keep their feelings within controls. All this is found in all her novels. She satirizes folly, irresponsibility and lack of self restraint in the ladies and gentleman of her time, through her novels. She brings out the irony behind the social mannerisms and conventions.

Jane Austen was a realist but her realism had many limitations. All her stories depict personal relationship between friends, between parents and children, between men and women in love. Her novels end with the ringing of marriage bell, and how to get married and propose in a good manner, forms the theme of many of her novels. The persons of her novel are neither of very high nor do very low estate and they have no great adventures. A picnic, a dance, amateur theatricals or at most an elopement are the outstanding events. The novels are also criticized to be written from a woman's point of view and dealing with the storms in the tea-cups. But the real storms of the size of life itself are lacking. We find decorum but the moments of forced passion or deep emotion never occur.

Jane Austen's novels are mainly concerned with marriages, considering a good marriage as the only solution to all problems. But do all problems really end with marriage? Does the only battle in human life is getting married to a right person and nothing more? She considers English society and its conventions, as ideal, and she advocates the correct norms and ways to follow them. Obviously, human life is not just decorum and the struggles of human life are far beyond these simple things. But Jane
Austen wrote novels about English mannerism and they became popular. They became the benchmark for many writers for years to come, after her.

This tradition of social realism set up by Jane Austen, was changed a bit by Charles Dickens, one more milestone of 'great tradition' of English fiction, in Victorian age. The spread of science made this age analytical and spread of democracy made it social and humanitarian. On the other side of the picture of commercial progress, was the picture of appalling social conditions of the new industrial cities, the squalid and unsanitary slums inhabited by discontented operatives, the exploitation of cheap labour; all this was reflected in Dickens’s novels. Victorian age was an age of transition, age of Industrial Revolution. Charles Dickens is a true representative of this age. He was a social reformer and his novels belong to the humanitarian movement of the Victorian era. He was a novelist with a purpose. In nearly all his books he set out to attack some specific abuse in the existing system of things. In all of them, there is an attack upon some legal or social evil. He satirized boarding schools in 'Nicholas Nickelby', the court of Chancery in ‘Bleak House', the new manufacturing system in 'Hard Times', the workhouses in 'Oliver Twist' and the snobbish lawyers in 'Great Expectations' etc.

Dickens was a realist in his art. He chose to describe and portray in his novel, the life he knew and the life he had observed throughout his life. He was essentially a painter of London life. He is at his best when he
deals with lower middle class life. Dickens gives us a whole galaxy of life-like characters. In his time, they were very popular and gathered thousands of readers. But on closer analysis, many of his immortal creations turn out to be not real persons, but brilliantly sketched personifications of vices and virtues. It has often been pointed out that his characters are not 'round' but 'flat'. Each represents one mood, one turn of phrase. Mr. Micawber is always waiting for something to turn up; Uriah Heep is 'humble' and has cold damp hands, Barkis is 'willing'.

Critics like Compton - Rickett say, "He lulls by the familiarity of his settings in the belief that he is a realist. But his realism lies on the surface and his pictures of London - life are magnificent pieces of idealized description."37 Dickens is also criticized for his pathos and melodramatic descriptions, following the popular trends of his day. Dickens's greatness and individuality lies in the fact that he tried to expose the evil conventions of English society. He thought beyond the domestic realities and narrated different aspects of civilized society, which no other writer before him was able to do, as successfully as him. In this matter, he is a trend - setter. He started the convention of depiction of political and social exploitations through his novels. But his realism had many limitations. He did not cover openly life as it is. Many times his pictures were one-sided and did not cover the entire human experiences and their psychological depths.

Other writers, of his age, like William Thackeray, Benjamin Disraeli etc. followed the same path. Thackeray was a social satirist and realist like Dickens. His novel ‘Vanity Fair’ was a great success through which he attacks the snobbery, affectation and humbug of human world. ‘Vanity Fair’ is Thackeray's vision of bourgeois London society. He tries to reveal the disgusting, brutal sordidness behind the elegant glitter of London Life. He also within his own limitations tries to present the realities of human life but is often charged of cynicism and excessive moralistic attitude.

Thomas Hardy is the last prominent writer of Victorian era, and probably of that old tradition of social realism established by Richardson and Jane Austen. Hardy’s writing is of that period when Victorian values had began to shake and the modernism was taking birth. Hardy was technically Victorian but we find him showing many qualities of modern life through his novels. For example, the complex situations of his novels, full of intrigues, the life full of shifting lights and colours, due to the mists of doubt and difficulty, and the way he treats his subjects, is modern. But the role of cruel and reckless fate or the happiness of the people depending upon the whims of the ‘chance’ is Victorian and the point of debate. Many times, he is criticised for his pessimistic attitude and his melodrama. His famous novels like ‘The Mayor of Casterbridge’ (1886), ‘Far From the Madding Crowd’ (1896), ‘Tess of the D’Urbervilles’(1891), ‘Jude the Obscure’ are all tragedies.
Hardy’s Wessex novels depict the region, the peasants residing over there and their sufferings. His pictures of peasants are real and inimitable. In a simple style, he portrays the woman’s heart and his heroines like Tess Durbeyfield, Jude Fawley, Arabella or Sue are well-known. It is said that Hardy is the representative of philosophical realism or Naturalism. But his realism had many limitations. He could call Tess, a raped woman, as 'a pure woman' and presents a real picture of the sufferings of a beautiful and poor peasant girl. But ironically, and quite unrealistically, seems to attribute the reason for almost all her miseries to the cruel fate or chance. Though, 'Tess' is not totally a 'wax doll', but her picture is very melodramatic and grim like a 'Sophoclean hero'. Same is the case with most of his characters. Concentration on 'fate' limits his realism and doesn't convey all aspects of life.

Henry James is an important writer, in the modern times, who followed the tradition of 'social realism' in his novels. Study of Henry James is a beginning point for the study of modern novel because he was the first to view it as an artistic form. To him, the novel was primarily an art form, to be judged solely by artistic canons, concerned with the objective and impartial presentation of the reality of life. His virtue is the air of reality or the success with which he has produced the illusion of life. "The Portrait of a Lady" (1981) "The wings of the Dove" (1902), "The Ambassadors" (1908) and "The Golden Bowl" (1904) are his important works. F.R. Leavis
summarizes the achievements of Henry James in his "Great Tradition" by saying:

"He is all the same, one of the great. His registration of sophisticated human consciousness is one of the classical creative achievements: it added something as only genius can. And when he is at his best, that something is seen to be of great human significance. He creates an ideal civilized sensibility; humanity capable of communicating by the finest shades of inflexion and implication: a nuance may engage a whole complex moral economy and the perceptive response to be the index of a major valuation or choice"  

Henry James gives a fine picture of civilized society and intellectuals like himself. But his pictures don’t include all classes or a broader and open view to look at the life. It is very pointed and limited to the ideals of sophisticated English society. Beyond the intellectual world and its decorum, there is nothing important for him.

**Significance and typical English features of the Great Tradition of English Novels:**

The above mentioned authors are some of the important authors of English novel tradition who are considered to be great by virtue of their

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portrayal of social realism and their individual creative style of depicting this realism. This great tradition of these novelists is very significant, in a sense; it chose a particular society and its code as a model and wrote accordingly. The entire chain of writers in 18th and 19th century, except a few exceptions, followed the same tradition. Following are some of the typical features of the great tradition:

i) Social realism: All these writers depict social realism through their novels. But the social realism for them is mostly related to the mannerisms, conventions and accepted norms of English society. How to follow them in a better manner and be prosperous in the worldly terms is a theme of most of these novels. No doubt, the tradition satirizes the evil practices of the society and denounces the follies and brutality of people in many cases; yet the range of this satire and the inclusion of all classes of society are very much confined and limited. The deeper problems of human existence, the human experience predominant universally, beyond the social norms, are never discussed by these authors.

ii) English Society is used as a model for the presentation of social realism. English people, their decorum, their socially accepted norms, are the only accepted world for them. That is why, most of these novels end happily with the ringing of marriage bells as if marriage is the ultimate solution of all problems in life. For example, Jane Austen concentrates on marriage and how to propose in a better manner. Dickens writes about
political and social exploitations and Hardy concentrates on fate. Thus, their views are concentrated on one of the complex issues of human life, mostly the general social problems.

iii) Treatment of evil in the society is another important feature of this tradition. The evil things in the society are satirized and pointed out with irony and humour. Irony and realism or the ironic picture of realism is the special characteristic of English fiction.

This was a general tradition of novels in English literature. But there were a few exceptions to this tradition, who understood the limitations of this general convention and tried to depict human experiences more openly and beyond the set norms and ideals of English society. In 18th and 19th century, we don’t find many exceptions to the tradition. But with the beginning of 20th century, thoughts of people began to change with the changing social, political and monetary systems. The shackles of old traditions were thrown away by society and they accepted a scientific, many a times, materialistic outlook. This is reflected in their novels.

We can broadly study these exceptions to the tradition as follows:

The novel originated from 'romance', but is developed as 'anti-romance'. The more the novel was mature in years, the more it became 'anti-romantic' or against the romanticism of facts of life or society. From
the heights of romance, it came to the low plains of real life and from that to the depths of psyche. It also ventured into newer topics in its journey.

Mary Shelley is one of the writers, who are exceptions to the tradition. Her individuality and importance lies in the fact that, in an age, when all her contemporaries wrote sentimental and social novels, she chose a different topic, which is applicable, today. But she anticipated the dangers of science long ago, when it was in a budding stage. Mary Shelley was not popular in her times; neither she is included in the list of great novelists by traditional critics. But in the modern age of science and technology, her novel, ‘Frankenstein’ and the problem discussed in it, has got much significance. Mary Shelley’s ‘Frankenstein’ or ‘The Modern Prometheus’ is a tale of terror. Its student hero Frankenstein constructed a monster from human fragments gathered in burial grounds and dissecting rooms, and galvanized it into life. It wrought a dreadful retribution upon its maker. The monster was nameless, but is often referred to in modern journalism, by its maker. The possible ‘Boomerang’ of modern science on its maker, that is, man, is the main fear of modern man, which is often alluded to Mary Shelley’s ‘Frankenstein’. It has become a key term of reference. She could foresee the ghastly realities in future and presented them in the same manner, without romanticizing them, in her novel. There lies her greatness.
Another important trend-setter, and an exception to the tradition in Victorian era, is Emily Bronte. She made revolution through her only novel, ‘Wuthering Heights’ (1947). She didn't follow the tradition but rather made the tradition after her. The psychological complex type of novel of modern age has its roots somewhere in Emily Bronte’s novel. The theme of social inequality, love-hate relationship, the revenge theme, the supernatural atmosphere and the natural imagery impressed many writers after her. ‘Wuthering Heights’ shows a marvellous understanding of passion and an intense sympathy with nature in her wildest moods. Emily presented a new conception of the heroine as a woman of vital strength and passionate feelings. The conception of wild moor-scenery is also new.

In the expression of the sense of supernatural given by wilder aspects and moods of nature, ‘Wuthering Heights’ stands almost alone. The novel is unique in English literature in many senses. Its chief characters are conceived in gigantic proportions, and their passions have an elemental force which carries them into the realms of poetry. The intensity of the novel increases to almost unbelievable peaks of passion, towards the climax and everything is described with stark realism. Emily Bronte pioneered the novels dealing with human soul. In place of the detached observation of a society, such as we find in Jane Austen and the earlier novelists, Bronte painted the sufferings of an individual personality. It looked deeper into the souls of the characters, narrated their passions,
malice and attachment, with good knowledge of human heart. Especially, we find here that, a woman's heart is laid bare with a startling frankness and depth of understanding.

George Meredith, a later Victorian novelist, contributed something new through his psychological novels. He tries to capture the subtle complexity of human life in its relation to its surrounding, in his novels. Many times, his novels seem to be obscure, as readers don't understand them. The cause of his obscurity, that is, psychological incidents in the novel, is the source of his originality. His novels are products of a comic spirit. He emphasized the value of comedy and used it as a weapon against pretentiousness, hypocrisy and conceit of humanity. It is clearly seen in his famous novels, 'The Egoist' and 'Evan Harrington'. It is said that he 'intellectualized' the modern novel.

Modern age was necessarily the 'Age of Interrogation'. Question! Examine! Test! These were the watchwords of this creed. Every voice of authority and the reign of the expert were challenged. The result was different types of experiments and different modes of expression. Novel, as a form, was part of that changing phenomenon. There was a revolt against the conventional trends and newer ways were followed in pursuit of creativity.
In this context, we may consider, Joseph Conrad, a typical novelist of modern age. He tries to capture the basic instincts of man, his aspirations and hallucinations in his fiction. His novels depict man's struggle against hostile forces, man's display of loyalty, courage and endurance in the face of heavy odds. The strength of his novels is his profound sense of the tragedy of life. *Almayer's Folly*, *The Nigger of the Narcissus*, *Lord Jim*, *Nostromo*, *Heart of the Darkness* are his important novels. His theme is often the struggle between man and the sea, an epic of endurance, victory or defeat; nearly always the action passes either or by the sea. Though, he writes adventure tales, he abandons their romantic gusto, and writes with realism enriched and modified by his own romanticism of the sea and Royalist revolutions. For him, the object of art is to give a complete impression of an incident in all its bearings, even if that involves using effects of other arts, such as painting and music. Thus, he has long descriptive passages, which aim at evoking a clear visual image. His choice of subjects and the settings of the novels are different and not related to general English Society and its presentation. Here, he differs from the tradition in many ways.

Conrad is alive to his times. He is sensitive to the stresses of the changing spiritual climate as they begin to be registered by the most conscious. Thus, his Robinson Crusoe can not bear a few days alone on his island and blows out his brains. He was a realist and in his novels,
treaded well the narrow path which lies between excess of realism on the one side and excess of romance on the other.

At his point, we can consider a few points about the influences on modern novels, for further analysis. The two world wars and their aftereffects have affected modern novels permanently. The inter-war fiction and post-war fiction carried the repercussions of war on them. Novels, first, hopeful and optimistic, later became, sceptical and cynical. It developed as an interpreter of life. The disillusionment, cynicism, despair and bewilderment in the face of the crumpling of established moral values, characterize the modern post-war fiction. The demand for complexity increased. In nineteenth century novels, the characters, broadly speaking, were at the end what they were at the beginning of the novel with certain unimportant changes. But in modern novels, the characters are complex. They are not just good or bad.

Another important influence is psycho-analytical discoveries, especially Freudian theory. Freud opened the way to exploration of the vast field of the subconscious and the unconscious, and thus encouraged the novelist's tendency to dwell more and more within the mind of his character. The entire atmosphere of this period was that of disbelief, loss of morality, disintegration of families and a mental chaos.
Pre-occupation with sex, is another important characteristic of modern age. Many writers dealt with this theme, some of them quite radically; Elizabeth Drew in her book 'The Modern Novel' in this context observes, "As Bunyan's Pilgrim ran crying 'Life, Life, External Life', the modern pilgrim ran crying 'Life, Life, Immediate Life'\(^{39}\). All these changes made writers to choose exceptional paths in writing. The age has produced a group of satirical writers who wrote about the follies of post war society and exposed the shallowness of the civilization.

We can find all these effects broadly reflected in the novels of D.H. Lawrence, who is a revolutionary writer of inter-war period. Lawrence used the novel to present to his reader his own interpretation of life. He was concerned with basic problems of human existence, man's relationships with his fellows and with the universe beyond himself. He rejected modern civilization and combined in his novels a violent hatred of the values of modern mechanized civilization with a love of primitive and natural, and a passionate belief in the importance of the development of everyone's unique individuality. He placed his trust in the experiences of the senses, which for him seem to gain in value as they become more violent. Man's primitive instincts and the impulses which spring from his unconscious mind are his safest guides in life.

Lawrence is particularly successful in analysis of unconscious. He represents his age when he deals with the complex, psychological issues. The conflict between man-human relationship, with all its attractions and repulsions, is the chief theme of all his novels. He deals with sexual relationship quite seriously. As he himself had once said, sex was his religion. Lawrence is, the prophet of the primitive instincts and passions. His appeal is to the heart rather than the head. Lawrence's masterpiece 'Sons and Lovers' (1913) is a powerful novel of deep sincerity which studies with insight the relationship between a son and a mother. He studies the complex possessive nature of a woman in that. 'The Rainbow' and 'Women in Love' deal with the theme of a conflict between a man and a woman and depict Lawrence's views of human life. 'Lady Chatterley's Lover' which he calls as 'very truly moral' analyses the deep passions and sexual relationships.

With D.H. Lawrence, the English novel came to a new mode. To quote F.R. Leavis, who calls Lawrence as the last name in the great tradition of English fiction, "He is most daring and radical innovator in 'form, method, technique. And his innovations and experiments are dictated by the most serious and urgent kind of interest in life"[40].

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Another distinctive novelist of the beginning of 20th century is E.M. Forster. He wrote on the contemporary scenario, choosing distinctive themes than others. Forster handles varied points of view. He shows the complexity of life in his novels, avoiding the simplification and generalization which would present one side as right and the other wrong. With a cool, often ironic detachment, he presents the problems arising from varied situations with breadth of outlook.

"Where Angels Fear to Tread", "A Room with a View" and "Howards End" are his important novels. But his masterpiece is "A Passage to India" (1924) which deals with the misunderstandings which arise in relationships, between individuals in one case and between races on the other. "A Passage to India" is a very significant novel for its presentation of the complex problems which were found in the relationships between English and the native people in India. It aims at no solution and offers no explanation. It merely records with sincerity and insight the conflict of races in Post-war India, unable to forget its glorious past and trying to assert its individuality.

After this age, a new type of novel was introduced under the influence of the psycho-analytical school of Jung and Freud Adler, that is, 'stream of consciousness novel'. In 'stream of consciousness novel', everything is presented through an apparently unorganized succession rather than by logical argument or narrative sequences. The 'action' takes
place and the plot develops through the mind of the principal character and his 'stream of consciousness' reflects all the forces of which he is aware as they are playing upon him at any one moment, an outside event and the associations being presented more or less simultaneously. Stream of consciousness novelists take us to the hidden recesses of ever-changing consciousness of their characters. We go into character's pre-speech levels of consciousness and see what is happening there, thus cutting down the old barriers between the readers and the novelist’s characters. James Joyce and Virginia Woolf are the most popular and eminent practitioners of this theory.

James Joyce is a serious novelist, and his concern is chiefly with human relationships - man in relation to himself, to society, and to the whole race. He presents the seamy side of life, the pettiness and meanness of modern society and the evils which spring from it, all this, he presents with startling frankness. He is a keen and subtle analyst of man's inner consciousness, and is much pre-occupied with sex.

James Joyce is a pioneer in the quest of 20th century novelists for a new technique to present contemporary human dilemma. He used the 'stream of consciousness' and the 'internal monologue' successfully in his novels and many novelists followed him. Through this technique, his character study, for the reader, becomes more vivid and subtle.
James Joyce's first work is 'Dubliners'. It is objective short story-study of the sordid Dublin slums, very powerfully written and has its distinctive narrative style. His 'A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man' presents an intently moving account of the internal struggles of an artist torn between the standards of an ascetic upbringing and his desire for the beauties of art. Stephen Dedalus may be identified with Joyce. But the writer preserves a cool detachment in the precise analysis of his hero's spiritual life. Dedalus appears again in 'Ulysses', a study of the life and mind of Leopold and Mrs. Bloom during a single day. It is modelled on the 'Odyssey' of Homer, but it is set in the squalor of Dublin slums. It presents the view of the hopeless dilemma of man in post-war world. Joyce's work is very significant taking into consideration, the period in which it was written.

20th Century produced many gifted women writers who wrote from the women's point of view and brought new sensitiveness and new dimensions of English fiction. Virginia Woolf is one among such innovative artists. In her form and technique, the use of 'stream of consciousness' and the search for feminine ideal, she is elegant and interesting. She seems to be trying to comprehend the elusive meaning of life, especially exploring the feminine psyche through her novels. Her major purpose was communication through fiction of sense of reality. But her conception of reality differed fundamentally from the realism of earlier novelists. She was
persuaded that reality is an inward subjective awareness, a spiritual aspect; and the same she explores in her novels. The elusiveness of these inner realities is the recurrent theme of her novels. Her characters are seen in search of them and the search is followed with profound insight.

Virginia Woolf successfully uses the technique of 'stream of consciousness' in her novels. There is very little plot or story in the traditional sense. Her aim is to make human personalities real by absorbing the reader's interest in their thought processes. "Mrs. Dalloway" (1925) opens with Mrs. Dalloway going out to buy flowers for a party and closes with a description of party, but within these limits a most complex and fascinating pattern of human existence is woven. "To the Light House" which is regarded as her finest novel, is simple in structure. Mrs. Ramsay plays a central character there and we pass from her consciousness to the consciousness of all those most near to her. Her work is criticised by some critics, as her world is limited. Her characters seem to live in a mist. There is deep sadness and certain coldness in her world. But her uniqueness lies in the depiction of 'inner reality' of woman's psyche.

In post-war period, many social, political and spiritual changes affected the fiction. William Golding is a very significant novelist, writing in this period. He differed from tradition in his approach and themes. He tries to probe behind the realities of modern civilization. It can be said that the Victorian era was optimistic about the 'progress' of civilization from good to
better. But after two world wars, it was almost impossible to believe in the inevitability of progress. Golding was a child of this disillusioned generation. His novels uncovered in men more evil than good. Golding has always been deeply concerned with the problem of evil. He believes that when man is given the choice between good and evil, he will more often than not, choose the latter. His novels bring out the same ideas. They are visions of man's tragic hopelessness and helplessness.

His first novel "Lord of the Flies" (1954) was a conscious overturning of Victorian utopian visions. Deserted on an uninhabited island after a plane crash, a party of school boys quickly degenerates into vindictive barbarism. The roughish Jack emerges as a calculating and ruthless dictator, while the fat and clumsy Piggy is taunted, tortured and eventually killed with the Christ like Simon. The novel ends with the timely arrival of a naval officer, a symbol of civilization again, offers hope for enlightened values in a world returning to savagery. The novel is a damning case against 'civilised' man. Golding's other novels like 'The Inheritors' or 'The Pyramid', also deal with the same theme of complexities of modern civilization and the problems arising out of them. His novels are thought provoking, penetrating deeply into the realities of modern life, much powerfully.

Another important critique of modern society, writing in the same environment as that of Golding, is George Orwell. He was a 'novelist of
idea'. His novels show his sharp eye for social distress and his efforts to grasp the horrors of the times through which he lived. His post second world war political fiction has had a much deeper influence on contemporary thinking. 'Animal Farm' reads like a children's story or a fairy tale. The novel is set on an English farm, on which the animals have all the sensitivity of humans. They bring out, with a fine allegory, the vices and evils of modern society. Orwell's 'Nineteen Eight-Four' is also a realistic modern utopia. It is another study in tyranny. Stalin's Russia, in its more fearsome aspects, has been translated to Britain. It is a fine satire and impresses the readers deeply.

All these authors are the prominent novelists of the tradition of English novels. Apart from these, there are many writes who wrote in this tradition. Some broad examples are chosen here for the analysis purpose which gives us now, the bird's eye view of the history of English novels.

**Muriel Spark's Place in the tradition and Individuality:**

Muriel Spark depicts social reality very prominently through her novels. But her presentation of social reality is much different from the general, old tradition of social realism in English novels. She belongs to the second tradition of exceptions from the convention. These are the writers who didn't merely follow the tradition but chose their individual
styles, themes and innovative forms and methods of writing. They were realistic as well as creative in their choice of subject and quite open in depiction of them. They didn't hold English Society as ideal, instead, the total human experiences, the fundamental issues related to human existence and his psyche, beyond the norms and mannerisms of a particular society, were their subjects. May it be Emily Bronte, D.H. Lawrence, Conrad, Woolf or William Golding, everybody was individual, still to some extent, connected to the tradition in some aspects but quite revolutionary and a trend setter, in their turn. Muriel Spark belongs to this tradition.

But being in the tradition doesn't mean that, she just continued to travel the path, well set by her predecessors. Instead, she stands out as distinctly individual novelist in the history of modern novelists. Her innovative, brief, witty and suspenseful 'fast forward' type of a narrative technique, her minute observation and depiction of modern civil society in her novels, with all its social and psychological intrigues and its metaphysical dimensions place her in the position of a successful heir of English Novelists. Her writings show the traces of continuation of tradition as well as an interesting and intriguing difference from the tradition.

**Aspects of Spark's Novels:**
Muriel Spark presents social problems through her novels. But her portrayal of social reality is not just the presentation of surface reality or the apparent political and social problems. Apart from these, she is concerned mainly with the existence of human beings. In the adverse external circumstances, her characters face the battle of existence, or the problem of being alive in the given situations. Spark handles the fundamental issues which have universally been the concern of all human beings in all ages; they are: What is the meaning of human existence on this earth? Why does man suffer? And how does he manage to be happy in spite of the adverse conditions? All these questions don't remain just the philosophical broodings in Spark's novels. They are dealt in relation with the modern life situations. Her character are not just wax dolls, living the artificial lives; instead they are real human beings, representatives of modern men and women, living a complex life and successfully fighting the battle of existence through all the hassles and oddities of modern situations. Their stories ultimately portray the quest and sufferings of modern men and women depicting some characteristic perspectives on their social, psychological and religious dimensions.

This leads us to Camus's 'Myth of Sisyphus' where Sisyphus has been punished to endlessly roll the big rock to the top of the mountain from where it falls again, and again Sisyphus pushes it up to the mountain. What prompts Sisyphus to push that stone again and again to the top of
the mountain, is a myth. Sisyphus fights with his fate, bears unlimited suffering and his quest is never fulfilled. But still he is happy and hopeful, as he has accepted his fate as it is and decides to be happy in the same situation. Spark's characters also live in the similar fashion. Many a times, their quests remain unfulfilled; they have to suffer for their existence on this earth. But they find their own solutions to the problems and accept their fate in their own way, searching the happiness and their selfhood through religion, philosophy, creativity or some other thing. Though the quests are unlimited, sufferings persist; the battle for existence never ends for them. The suffering many a times, becomes useful and the self-realization, as well as the redemption of soul is achieved through it. This fundamental drama of clashes between the hostile situations and the fight of human beings to overcome them is very aptly presented by Spark in her novels. This is where Spark differs from the tradition. Her handling of basic issues related to human life and the practical portrayal of them, make her depiction of social reality in the novels, very deep and authentic. Her greatness and individuality as a novelist, is heightened by this aspect, to the most extent.
Social Problems in Spark’s Novels:

Depiction of social reality is a prominent feature of Muriel Spark’s novels. Spark portrays the social experiences of her characters, their day to day life and its complexities, their experiences of being with others and their inner experiences in all her novels with equal potential. Her novels are a study of different individuals. They all are mostly from the sophisticated civil societies, who pursue their views and ideas in their own way. Her characters exercise freedom, self-will and take their own decisions. But fate has placed them in such a position that they have to suffer and struggle during their lives. They struggle to get a strong foothold in this world and they suffer in the pursuit of their beliefs. They also suffer because of their feeling of lost identity and alienation from the world. While narrating all this, Spark uses a different ‘narrative technique’ from the tradition. She writes in a speedy, economic and pin-pointed witty style, without making it much emotional or melodramatic. She is also an ardent critic of social life and writes with a satire and a pungent commentary on the happenings of life. Spark has been casting a jaundiced eye on British society in more than twenty works of her fiction, with a terse, astringent style and which is blessed with a wicked satiric wit. We can analyze some of the examples of these depictions of social realities in Spark’s novels as follows:
Quest for more and more money and degrading social conditions:

In her novel, “The Takeover”, Spark narrates a quest for more and more money and degrading social conditions of modern society. It is a glittering, knowing novel about the decline of the West. She writes of the rich, the clever, the sophisticated, and the experienced in a better way than the innocent and unknowing. Maggie, the heroine of “The Takeover”, is the most recent in a long line of narcissistic, eye-catching, manipulating women, which Spark presented. She is middle-aged, much married, immensely wealthy, the natural target of predatory lovers and jewel thieves. Her most recent husband is an Italian Marchese, and the action of the novel takes place in Italy. Much of it revolves around Maggie’s attempts to dispossess her old friend Hubert Mallindine of a house that he claims she gave him.

The novel presents a glittering surface. It is a glossy novel about the high society rich people who have to take a lot of pains and despair many times, as they attempt to foil their predators – by hiding their jewels in hot water bottles, by making false floors to false kitchens, by burying their ill gotten gains in their mothers’ well-tended graves. But, as ever, Muriel Spark raises the question: What lies beneath this dazzling game? Anything? Or Nothing? Maggie, who can hypnotize people with her luxury,
grace and beauty wherever she went, is in fact, a witty woman, but devoid of any emotional depth or a real peace of mind. At the end of the novel, she is able to secure the major part of her wealth. But is she left with real happiness? Or her thirst for more would continue till the end of her life? The question is unanswered.

In this novel, Spark writes much about money. She describes the change that overtook the world in 1973, with the rise of Arab oil power and the fear of global recession, and says –

“It did not occur to one of those spirited and in various ways intelligent people around Berto’s table that a complete mutation in our means of nourishment had already come into being where the concept of property and money were concerned..... Such a sea change in the nature of reality as could not have been envisaged by Karl Marx or Sigmund Freud.”

And for the rest of the novel, we watch their efforts to defeat or adapt to this change, and Maggie’s final dramatic recognition of it. Thus, as the novel proceeds towards end, the reader, with the novelist, realizes that the scenario of Palladian mansions and expensive hotels and grand apartments with Louis XIV chairs, must change; so must the cast list of millionaires and servants and spongers, as well as the wardrobe of Gucci

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Shoes and Bulgari Steel matches, the backdrop of Gauguin’s and Porsches, as the real world is far behind that.

In this novel, Muriel Spark spies on the amusements of the idle rich, the collusions of those paid to safeguard them, as well as the inspired improvisations of that smaller cadre preying on the jet set. Chronologically, 'The Takeover' revolves around that moment in 1973 when Western Society was thrown off its stroke by the oil crisis which followed the Arab-Israeli war. But its net is wider yet. It confronts readers with home truths drawn from international art theft, sexual mores and religion. Spark provides a characteristic nudge when she shows the limits of those who feel that theories of high finance embody the only reality. "And thus they personalized and demonologized the abstractions of their lives, believing them to be fundamentally real, indeed changeless."

The time is the troubled 70s, and as Italy slides toward anarchic egalitarianism, immense wealth is becoming less and less fun. When she and her third husband stay at their house on the island of Ischia, they must hire men to stand on the beach and pose as intruders in order to crowd out the real ones. Maggie Says: "The time is coming when we'll have to employ our own egg throwers to throw eggs at us, and my God, of course, miss their aim, when we go to the opera on a gala night." "  

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43 Ibid, Page No. 122.
thieves, communist lawyers, speculating financiers all descend on Maggie and leave her fortune in tatters.

Another important character in the novel is Hubert Mallindaine who recognizes that he lies in a world "avid for immaterialism". Hubert's view of life is that of a theatre. For sometime, he had functioned as a cultural adviser for the wealthy Maggie Radcliff. On his counsel, she invests in property at Lake Nemi, near Rome, famous for its links with the classical past. Now embarked on fresh undertakings, including a new husband, Maggie wants to evict Hubert from a house, one of three on her land. Forty-five, impudently gay, Hubert insists that his former patron has no right to force him out. His case rests on two conditions. The minor one is that Maggie Radcliff made over his new house as remuneration for his services. The weightier, as well as the more audacious, is that Hubert claims to be a descendant of the goddess Diana, once specially worshiped at Lake Nemi. Changing locks to thwart intruders, dispatching antique furniture to have it faked - the proceeds going to his own bank account - he activates a new religion, one which will replace upstart Christianity. Needless to add, he presides as its high priest.

Maggie herself on her part is even more headstrong. She is one of the most delightfully prodigal of Muriel Spark’s heroines. In her late forties,
Maggie still manages to convey a "Flood -lit look". She is consumed by an urge not to be put down by adversaries. Sometimes imperious she faces crises by shrieking - yet she draws people like flies, even Hubert feels a need to phone her when discouraged. Being amoral, she counsels her daughter-in-law to give herself room for affairs. She nevertheless howls like a wolf when anything threatens her "moneyed peace".

After 1973, her empire suffers from mounting Vandal raids. Her villa at Ischia is burglarized. Her latest financial adviser, Coco de Renault, turns out to be the scoundrel who has stolen a fortune out of her control. As this point, Maggie's wrath surges to the fore. She hires men to kidnap the villain, after having made a deal to pay a commission of thirty percent of the huge ransom. "Why shouldn't I be a Criminal?" she sums up her ethical stance. "Everyone else is". Of Course, she learns nothing and dabbles in criminal adventure as in everything else. At the close, when she has been notified that none of the three houses belongs to her, and that the lawyer who handled the purchase was a fraud, she still acts with appalling indiscretion. She is quick to hire yet another man of law. Meanwhile, the consultant engaged to evict her tenant now sides with Hubert, conspiring, for a fee, to transport Hubert's stolen treasures out of the country. But Maggie doesn't surrender and finally retrieves her fortune in the climax.

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45 Ibid, Page No. 205
46 Ibid. Page no. 246
At first, one thinks of "The Takeover" as having primary reference to Hubert's defence, or else to Maggie's campaign against him. But if one goes deeper for analysis, he can realize that the intention of the symbolism is to suggest a crisis that may eventually reach the dimensions of a cultural disaster. The fabric of a whole society is shredding in front of our eyes. Absurd local laws reinforce the instability of the economic scene. What chiefly prevents Maggie from taking stronger action against Hubert is a dread of scandal. In this, she has been advised by her Italian husband, who warns against courting the ire, not of legal authorities, but of radical groups, most notably the communists. While all the tricksters are amusing, the other level of reality, with its own stores of energy, persists even though it is unacknowledged. In one scene, significantly minor, while two servants are discussing the predicament of one of them, who is pregnant, a hint is given about yet another secret cult. The two women, uneducated and vengeful, agonize lyrically with loud cries, "while the whole of eternal life carried on regardless, invisible and implacable, this being what no skinny craving cat with its gleaming eyes by night had ever pounced upon". 

What is being exposed is a shambles not unlike the expiring stages of the Roman Empire. The economic crisis is but one side of a larger story. 'The Takeover' is not a novel about money so much as an appeal for a re-

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examination of priorities. The quotation of St. Paul given in the novel is a small sign of redemption. The quotation cites that the desire for money is the root of all evil. Here, too, Paul laments that reason has become atrophied and that, many, even among the faithful, have been misled by verbal quibbles. The fact that by now the term 'scandal' is applied primarily to embarrassments over the juggling of material possessions suggests how blithely ignorant of scandal in its more traditional sense Western Society has become. For all its cult of openness, in "The Takeover" sensitivity has grown brutalized. Thus, the novelist allegorically and satirically comments on the decline of Western society on various grounds.

**Post-War England and the perplexing social evils:**

Spark’s readers are taken on satiric jaunts through various cities, times and places, throughout her novels, bringing them face to face, mind to mind, with life’s odd, harrowing, real perplexities. With a sharp observational eye, she is able to put flesh – eerily familiar flesh at times – on the human predicament and its attendant conflicts. It’s all there: good versus evil, honour versus duplicity, self-rejection versus self-pity. And Spark is wickedly funny in this process as well as shrewdly witty in her allegories.

Spark’s ‘The Girls of Slender Means’, as the title indicates, a story about a group of girls, who are mostly concerned with love and money and
depicted much satirically in the novel, are living in London in the spring of 1945, right after the European victory, in a four – story Edwardian mansion known as the ‘May of Teck Club.’ This building, converted long ago from a private establishment to a home for ‘Ladies of Slender Means’ below the age of 30 who had to live away from their families in order to ‘follow an occupation’, was still serving its purpose. Now decayed and shaky, the building had a certain grandeur.

There are two kinds of time in ‘The Girls of Slender Means’. There is the ‘past’ of that far – off spring of wartime regulations and shortages when the girls in the May of Teck Club bartered soap and chocolate and shared one Schiaparelli evening dress for their outings among them and there is ‘present’ when these girls have long since scattered to their various fates. But it is in the past that the action of the story and its violent culmination take place. All these girls remember the happenings of the past after hearing terrible news of the execution in remote Haiti of young man named Nicholas Farringdon, whom they had often seen while they were together. Farringdon had been, at the time, they knew him, was an unsung poet with anarchic ideas about society. But he had travelled a long way since then, and he died for the Christian faith.

This novel is entirely plot less. Spark focuses on the superficial or ‘slender’ lives of the girls, on their obsession with love and money. Instead of plot, we have the makings of a conversion or seduction narrative.
Holding events together thematically and structurally are lines of poetry, especially Hopkins’s ‘The Wreck of Deutschland’. “The most arresting aspect of this novel”, as Jay L. Halio points out, “is the way poetry interleaves through it .... highlighting and commenting upon both the characters and the action. In a way never before or since as fully or effectively’. Greggie’s bomb finally detonates damaging a gas main and setting the May of Teck on Fire. In the rescue efforts, all but Joanna escape, a parallel to Hopkins’s tall nun, and the last resident to exit through the skylight. Ruth Whittaker says, Joanna is ‘meek, accepting, and entirely unselfish,’ and because of “her endless capacity for self-sacrifice she is emotionally destroyed long before the fire kills her.”

The slim, sultry, and seductive Selina, who routinely trades sex for inordinate supplies of soap and sweet coupons, re-enters the burning building, after escaping first, just to retrieve the Schiaparelli dress. Horrified, the bohemian Nicholas unconsciously makes the sign of cross, which begins his path to conversion, the priesthood, and subsequent martyrdom in Haiti. He first had thought that Selina is re-entering the building probably to save somebody. But where Selina’s narcissistic impulse reminds Nicholas of the reality of a hell, Joanna’s unselfishness and intercessory role effect his conversion.

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Girls and its closest precursor, ‘The Wreck of Deutschland’ which echoes the theme of the novel, share a similar process of religious conversion, public indifference to personal disaster, and the martyr theme. Nicholas was shocked by Selina’s gross materialism – that this woman with whom he was intimate and had invested so much working with ‘the aim of converting her soul’, and ‘the awakening of her social conscience’\(^50\), risked death to retrieve a mere material object. Obsessed with what he wants Selina to be, Nicholas refuses to see her “as she really is until the reality is too terrible to be ignored”\(^51\). And that while, indeed, her body was slender, “austere and economically furnished’, she did not, like her moral opposite Joanna, subscribe to an ethic of ‘dispossession and poverty’\(^52\).

Selina’s selfish, maniacal act represents the total dismantling of the fairy – tale myth Nicholas had built up around her and other residents of the May of Teck. Nicholas “Seemed to be in love with the entire club …. a common effect of the may of Teck club on its male visitors”. Holding “his ideal of the place”\(^53\). Nicholas became enamoured of the May of Teck club as an aesthetic and ethical conception. He conceived of it as a

\(^{53}\) Ibid. Page no. 84
Marxist system, the ‘miniature expression of a free society... a community held together by the graceful attributes of common property”.*

The decay of modern society in terms of morals and ethics and increasing materialism, as is the theme of most of the modern literature, is reflected over here very prominently and effectively. The ‘London-life’ of post war period is depicted with a clear vision.

**Shams of Modern Civil society:**

Muriel Spark’s commentary on sophisticated civil society is evident even in her novel ‘Symposium’. The Classically correct activity at a symposium is to drink in a company. That is the ancient formula for producing sparkling conversation. Here Spark has assembled all her characters of the novel at a dinner party and their individual stories are narrated in a sort of flash-back technique. The hosts are a middle aged cafe society couple in London who have long been comfortably unmarried; Hurly Reed is an American artist and Chris Donavan is an immensely rich Australian widow. Other guests are, Lord Suzy who keeps on narrating the story of robbery at his house and the Lady Suzy, a 22 year old lady who is understandably restless after less than a year of marriage. There is Annabel Treece, who believes that each of them belongs psychologically to a particular century. Then, Margaret Damien, an exotic-looking bride

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accompanied by her doting and rich husband, poses to be a sweet doll with a sublime philosophy. But in fact, she is mystically related to three murders shown in the novel. And the last couple, Ella and Ernst Untzinger, is distracted at the time of dinner party; they are both crazy about the footman they have supplied to help serve the dinner. Each has long been wondering who, if not the other, gave their protégé that expensive watch, and in return for what.

It is a sophisticated novel that deals with sexual and emotional entanglements in an extremely witty and economic style. With brief snatches of conversation, ten characters at a London dinner party are introduced with such clarity that the reader knows who would be a bore to sit next to whom and who will drink too much.

But the civilized life is all a show, like a thin, false mask, easier to strip. Margaret Murchie’s story, who is the guest of honour along with her new husband, William Damien, heir to a big Australian fortune, elaborates this point. Margaret has been linked to three mysterious deaths. She was the last person to see alive her grandmother, her school teacher and a nun at the convent where she went to atone for the death of the first two. Now, she would be happy to dispatch her wealthy mother-in-law, Hilda Damien, who is expected for dessert in the party. The mysterious deaths and her connection with them, has made her mind, a criminal. But Hilda Damien is killed by the burglars who thought she would be dining out. The
information of her wealth and her absence from house is given to the burglars by Luke. Luke is a graduate student, who has affairs with both Earnest Untzinger and his wife. He hires himself out for parties so that he can supply guest list to a ring of thieves who prefer to do their work when no one is home. Hilda Damien, a self-made millionaire and a gentle woman is unnecessarily killed in this entire scenario.

Spark considers the serious questions of religion and guilt, insanity and illumination, free will and destiny with a light humour and irony in this novel. Margaret, given to icky sweetness, vacuous sentiments and pre-Raphaelite poses in velvet dresses with flapping sleeves, would be comic if she had not apparently turned murderous along the way. The reader is left to ponder when she lost her innocence. Was it when she schemed to meet her rich husband in the produce section of Marks & Spencer's? "Those grapefruits look a little bruised", she warned her prey to win his trust earlier. Or when she asked her demented uncle if he could see his way clear to drown her new mother-in-law in pond? The author provides no clue. There is no proof that proximity to the earlier deaths was anything but bad timing on her part, but the burden of association may have turned her into a person capable of violence. The robbers, of course, make any evil design on her part, unnecessary, and we are left to wonder about her moral culpability. Here is a slippery slope which Spark leaves for
the readers to consider. The title is satiric and with the mystic touches of supernatural, the novel throws light on the shams of modern civil society.

The ‘Symposium’, is a parody of modern platonic dialogue. There is also a small murder mystery in the novel. But mainly its portrayal of the shams of elite society and the inbuilt satire in it, interests the reader.

**Superficiality behind the glossy fields:**

Spark is expert in exposing the reality behind the superficially glossy fields of modern age through an entertaining story. She has done this frequently through her various novels. She uses her 18th Novel, “A far Cry from Kensington”, as a perfect vehicle for exposing the sham realities of the publishing world. The novel is also a wonderful picture of middle class society of London in post war years. The novel depicts the London in 1954, when the war was over but food rationing was still in effect. It is set in a rooming house in which reside a number of genteel folk, who cook on gas rings and share the bathroom down the hall. The medical student, two young married people, the district nurse obsessed with cleaning her room, one Polish emigrant dressmaker, Wanda and the protagonist of the novel, Mrs. Hawkins, are all vivid creations of Spark, depicting the absurdities of human life.
Mrs. Hawkins, a young war widow narrates here her experiences of the society. She works in a publishing firm. She is a straight forward, matter of fact lady who cannot compromise on certain principles. Thus, when Mrs. Hawkins, refuses to help a terrible writer, Hector Bartlett, and abuses him, when he pesters her too much, she has to lose her job, as Hector is a rich person and knows how to publish his silly work at any cost. After this, Mrs. Hawkins joins another publishing firm, and here also when she cannot control commenting harshly on Hector Bartlett, she has to abandon her second job also for a single comment. Hector has a powerful protector, the famous novelist, Emma Loy. Although no one can figure out what Miss Loy see in him, “Wherever she went these days he had to go. It was a phenomenon nobody could explain”*55

Muriel Spark herself had lived in South Kensington from about 1950 to about 1955. She had also worked with several publishers on different positions. In one interview she has said, “There have been a number of men in my life like Hector Bartlett. But Hector Bartlett is not based on any one of them; there again, it’s a conglomerate picture; but authentic. There are plenty of them still around”*56. The publishing field is considered to be a prestigious, glossy field in the society. The same is the opinion of most of the characters in this novel. They are ready to work in this field in spite


56 Kermode Frank. The Interviews with Seven English Novelists. Partisan review 30. 1963
of the low remunerations, just because it is a prestigious field. But the irony behind the situation is that it is not as glorious as it seems. There are frauds by the publishers, blackmailing by the renowned authors for giving their works for publication and the exploitation of the employees. Behind the glittering and pious field of knowledge, money matters are more important than the ethics of the business or the quality of writing. That is why, Hector Bartlett’s meaningless work, is given to Mrs. Hawkins for editing or completely rewriting it but the name as an author would be of Hector Bartlett’s only. In spite of Mrs. Hawkins’s criticism and strong opposition of the work, it gets published and ironically, she has to lose her job twice for opposing it. Spark, with expert humour and irony, describes here the realities behind the superficially glossy field of publication. When she describes the London of 1950’s, one is definitely struck by the irony behind the situation and feels that, “Today is a far cry from yesterday.”

**Politics in religion: “A Modern Morality tale”**

‘The Abbess of Crew’, a short and unique novel by Spark is given a subtitle by her as ‘Modern Morality Tale’. In this novel, theological props point to immorality in Politics. The setting is the Abbey of Crewe, and the immoralities are those of Watergate. ‘The Abbess of Crewe satirizes politics in the Unités States as well as most of the principals and details of the Watergate affair (which eventually caused President Richard Nixon to
resign, following a congressional committee’s vote for impeachment). It comically criticizes short-comings in human nature and in the Catholic Church. The old Abbess is dead and the nuns are getting ready to elect a new one. At that point of time, the sub prioress, Alexandra comes into picture. She and her cohorts become concerned that sister felicity, her competitor, should be given the little chance to be elected as the next abbess, who was gaining on Alexandra (parallel of Nixon) with a flabby, sentimentally vague philosophy of love. Spark here satirizes both, Alexandra and also the insipidity of the Felicity – the latter nuns name being ideologically opposite. Alexandra then takes the support of Jesuit fathers. She leaves the meeting, however, and lets her subordinates intrigue with the fathers enabling her legalistic, dishonest rationalization that she has no firsthand knowledge of their schemes.

The two Jesuit novices steal sister Felicity’s silver thimble from her sewing box, just to prove that how simply it could be done. But ironically, in the next attempt, they are caught. The loss of sister Felicity’s thimble, which satirizes the pettiness of the original aim of the Watergate affair, unnerves her, helping to assure her political defeat, as does a speech by Alexandra appealing to the voting nuns’ snobbish allegiance to the upper rather than middle class (one of Spark’s satire at the American voting public) and complaining about the thimble’s loss being characterized as bourgeois rather than ladylike. With the election won and sister Felicity
expelled and then excommunicated, for continuing her long-running love affair with Thomas the Jesuit, the plans of the Alexandra faction continue to unravel because of the Jesuit novices’ demands for blackmail and Felicity’s unending charges of wrongdoing at the abbey.

Spark here satirizes the world of Abbey where so many other things, rather than the worship of the God happens. The image most frequently associated with Alexandra, throughout the novel is some sort of a tower: a Lombardy poplar soaring over prostrate shadows, an ivory tower, a Maharajah aloft on his elephant. Yet, though the erect being and physical stature of the Abbess are estimable, both individually and collectively the images also point to her faults. Alexandra is unwilling to let nature take its course, feeling compelled to win the election. She is addicted to technology, especially the electronic eavesdropping equipment, rather than devoted to God’s natural world. She has bugged entire Abbey, even the poplar grove, instead of living peacefully and worshipping God. One of her helping sisters is caught in men’s room while giving hush money to the Jesuit novices. New arrests, evidence and charges provoke Rome’s Congregational Committee of Investigation (equalling the Nixon-era congressional committee for impeachment) to summon the Abbess to the Vatican. She is ready to handover her notorious bugged tapes now, after deleting the Alexandra’s erotic verse passage from the sermons. The novel ends with Alexandra on her voyage
by ship. But the reader gets a feeling that she has won and the world is going to run like this, with all its virtues and vices, omnipresent everywhere, every time. This novel predominantly shows Spark’s allegorical skill and openness in depicting a social satire on the contemporary events with an unbiased attitude and an expert’s hand. Even being a devout Christian Catholic, she doesn’t hesitate to point out the politics and moral corruption in the holy places like the Abbey of Crewe in the story.

**A Satire on Current Literary Scenario:**

If we go ahead with the same theme of Spark’s expertise in social satire, we can get one more fine example, in Spark’s latest novel, *The Finishing School*, which satirically assails, among other things, the culture of spectacle that has grown up around novel-writing, and in particular around novel writing by attractive young people. In a Swiss finishing school, run on distinctly liberal lines are gathered nine pupils, most of them, girls. One attractive boy, Chris, seems to be a prodigiously gifted writer, a mere 17 year old who is already at work on a historical novel. The school’s owner and Principal, Rowland Mahler, teaches creative writing and he, too, is an aspiring writer, but thoroughly arrested where Chris is fertile. His wife, Nina, exasperatedly asks him one day, “Don’t you feel you’re one of those people who can get by without writing a novel?” But
Rowland is heedless. Rather, he is consumed by jealousy of Chris’s talent and the novel traces the growth of that envy as it develops almost to madness.

On one side, Spark satirizes the glamour attached to the field of novel writing. She talks about the Film Producers and Publishers who are eager to encash the craze among the people for the juvenile writer and how they arrive at the school to interview Chris. Meanwhile, she hints that Chris may be only a mediocre writer. But people don’t look only for talent in the contrast social reality. So, Spark refers in end to the eventual flamboyant literary success of Chris himself, if not entirely of his book. This is a very, characteristic remark. ‘The Finishing School’ is about literary competition and the literary world. Spark satirically mentions that, Chris, though not much talented, gets a success just because of his youth and his good looks. Publishers are more interested in the handsome looks of a young writer than the quality of his work and the same work sold also, for the similar reasons, just because of a craze for the sensation and a juvenile writer among the reading public.

On the other hand, Chris and Rowland, two aspiring writers, compete with each other, but it’s not a healthy competition. They don’t compete on the basis of quality of their writings; instead, they are extremely jealous of each other. Their jealousy reaches to such an extreme condition, that they even attempt to kill each other. Their
competition and issue against each other are solved in the end, ironically, not on healthy, sportive ground, but because of their psychological need of co-dependence and their homoerotic love for each other. Thus, Spark throws a light on the current literary scene and its faults, through this novel. Her irritation with the current literary scene, its triviality and populism, have raised a sharp satire in this book about these matters. She describes it with a keener instinct against hypocrisy, self-delusion and moral ambiguity.

**Problems during inter-war period and the role of a teacher:**

Muriel Spark has always shown a deep interest in the trials inflicted upon human frailty by social institutions such as the abbey, the boarding house, the literary society and most famously, the classroom. Her most famous novel, *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie* shows the dangerous consequences of the school teacher’s attempts to mould the identity of others. The bizarre, unforgettable character of Miss Jean Brodie brought Spark international fame and boosted her into the first rank of contemporary British literature. The work enjoyed multiple dramatic adaptations, a stage play, a film starring Maggie Smith in 1969 and a TV serial in 1978. The character of Miss Brodie was based in part on ‘Christina Kay’, a teacher of Spark’s for two years at Edinburgh. ‘The
Prime of Miss Jean Brodie’ is a story of a teacher and her six students who are commonly known as ‘Brodie Set’ and who are immensely impressed by their teacher who tries to mould their identity and control them like a God, in her own way. But it causes a very destructive effect on the students.

Spark began writing novels in the post war scenario and the age is clearly visible in her novels. It is evident in 'The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie'. After the Second World War, Britain saw extensive social and political changes. The gradual loss of Britain's economies, the growth of the Welfare State, followed by its erosion from the 70s onwards and the anxieties linked to the Cold War, were just some of the development that resulted in a change and redefinition of post war novels. 'The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie' is set in the Edinburgh of the 1930s and as such directly related to the history of fascism and the aftermath of war. The 1930s were characterized by the rise of authoritarian ideologies, the still fresh memories of World War I and Primarily by economic depression. One of the effects of the great depression was an increased rate of unemployment, which is represented in the scene where Miss Brodie and her pupils walk through the slums of Edinburgh's Old Town: “A very long queue of men lined this part of the street. They were without collars, in shabby suit --- In England they are called the Unemployed”.

A realistic description of life in the 1930s and these images show an appropriate picture of contemporary Edinburgh.

Spark here represents history and even fascist ideology, ironically. Miss Brodie admires Hitler's and Mussolini's way of restoring economic order in their countries. She is attracted to uniforms and applied almost fascist methods to shape her set. By highlighting those preferences, Spark attempts to describe how the increasing threat originating from Mussolini and Hitler went unnoticed by the public and was even positively perceived.

Spark's characterization of Miss Brodie suggests that fascism found its admirers everywhere; many anti modernist, ultra modernist people, like Brodie, fell too easily into the twentieth century fascism. Brodie's "unpleasant habits of manipulation reward for information and of changing the clear meanings of things," as per Mc William are attitudes that resemble a fascist dictator. Yet, Sandy after stating that Miss Brodie is a 'born fascist', acknowledges that for Miss Brodie politics is a mere side interest. Apart from exploring the impact of fascism on Miss Brodie, Spark also portrays the complexity of the political atmosphere and commitment in the 1930s.

As per Heynes, the Brodie set is "a sort of school within a school and thus an instance designed by their mentor, of an elitist manner"*59. Some critics conceive the set as "being limbs of a body whose head is Miss Brodie, a body integrated by carefully regulated use of power and cruelty."*60 As a consequence, Miss Brodie’s Crème de la crème is organized as a corps of fascists or a state and as such attempts to unmask the ideology behind.

Mary, for instance, is an outsider because the group has decided to treat her like one. Although Sandy hates herself for nagging Mary, she does it "with the feeling that if you did a thing a lot of times, you made it into a right thing, and after all it is for good fellowship's sake"*.61 Hence, in evoking this kind of atmosphere and climate of the 1930s the reader is forced to engage with the questions of how ideologies work and how contemporary characters are affected. Thus, Spark explores with her text the various perceptions of history by attempting to represent a plausible reality of the past and also to question what has happened during 1930s in political and historical terms.

Given its period setting between the world wars, the novel has an overtly political tone. Miss Brodie is consciously fascist, seeing in

Mussolini an embodiment of classical and Renaissance virtues. As a critique of fascism it works exceptionally well. But Miss Brodie has gone mad with her own sense of authority. She has searched for imaginative responses. Science and religion are too dispassionate for her. Appreciative of beauty, she demands a life of pure feeling in a social order of the sublime.

Miss Brodie’s sincere wish is to cultivate the sensibilities of the girls in her care. Her commitment to the girls is undeniable. However, in the end, Miss Brodie is like the devil quoting scripture for his own purpose. Miss Brodie’s mistake is to deny the ordinary things of life, failing to see how the quirks of behaviour and misfortunes of experience engender the dignity of character. Ideals of purity must surrender to reality. Most of us have known someone like Miss Jean Brodie. Miss Brodie is a universal and most memorable of all of Spark’s characters. Through her, in this novel, Spark has wonderfully satirized the evil effects caused by social institutions like schools on the young minds. The novel also comments on the political and historical perspectives of the period.

**The decay and delusion of modern cities:**

In ‘The Hothouse by the East River’, Spark presents the decay and delusions of modern cities. The entire novel is a strange combination of suspenseful eerie images, a medley of various scenes from various pieces
of time. Elsa and her husband Paul, traverse through various joints of time and have various visions. One interpretation of the novel might be that, in wartime London, at that instance of death, Elsa and Paul were granted a moment of vision as to what might have befallen them had they lived longer. But they lived it or prophesied it, either their experience or their intuition, teaches them that such a life has been or would have been a failure. The real purpose of the novel seems to be the allegorical commentary by the author on the modern society and its amorality. Spark says, “New York – has become the mental clinic....... where, we analyze and dope the savageries of existence”\textsuperscript{62}. “Apart from muggings and murders, one of the savageries is the temperature, impossible to control. We are stupefied either by the purr of air conditioners or the noise of radiators which burn like kindled stoves to the touch”\textsuperscript{63}. The novel comments on the youngsters of New York, that is, how they have developed the bad habits and morality problems. It is also an allegorical and metaphysical commentary on the existence of life. The novelist tells the reader, at the start of the final chapter that, at a London railway station, on their way back to military base, Elsa and Paul, as well as a number of their friends, died in a V-2 raid after the world war. So, the initial chapter and the climax are just a vision, which tells Elsa and Paul how fertile their

\textsuperscript{63} Ibid. Page no.73
existence on earth might have been had they survived after that railway accident.

This vision ultimately turns out to be horrifying and despairing for both of them. Their life in New York would have been frustrating and lonely. Their vision shows them that both of their children are living their life immorally, without gaining any respectable and responsible position in the society, heading directionless to more moral and ethical degradations. They disregard their parents and live independent lives. Even Elsa and Paul quarrel with each other and Paul has distrust for Elsa. Their friends also live in similar conditions. Of course, this vision is dreadful for them and they happily go back to their world beyond. Spark here allegorically describes the problems of decay and delusion of modern cities in the post war period.

**Corrupting morality in Modern Society:**

There are many novels of Spark, which depict social realism from various angels. *‘Not to Disturb’*, a short novel of Spark with the most rapid storyline where the events start at nightfall and reach the climax early next morning, portrays the same theme. Servants keep vigil during one night when the Baron and his wife confer behind locked doors with their secretary, a young man who has been caught in an affair with his employer’s spouse. Led by the imperious Lister, the servants plan for what
must be done after violence has eliminated the three closeted scapegoats. As Lister explains, “The popular glossy magazines have replaced the servants’ hall in modern society”*. The reader gets one of his few hints when Lister, refers to the Baron as “a pornophile merely”. The catastrophe takes place, all three of them, the baron, the baroness and the secretary, are murdered. But the servants have already anticipated this tragedy and the novel narrates the story of how they are looking for the best bargain after that. They are even bargaining with the journalists and television reporters and film makers for the first crack of the story even before anything has happened.

In the meanwhile, a maid who may be pregnant by any number of candidates in the house, is made the wife of the idiot young man sequestered in the attic, a youth who turns out to be the younger brother and heir of the baron. This process of contraction recurs relentlessly. The main problem at the close is which of the servants, a titled neighbour will be able to hire. The final view of Lister in the novel is his hurrying around to make the most advantageous arrangements.

On that wealthy estate in Switzerland, enterprising servants adroitly encourage an aristocratic love-triangle to follow its natural course into murder and suicide. Lister, the butler, with a shrewd eye to the media,

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calculates the most sensational and lucrative aspects of the story with delighted enthusiasm and without a qualm of compunction. He is like a mathematician dealing with angels rather than with people. Mixing his geometrical metaphors, he writes in his memoir of the evening’s disaster, even before the deaths have occurred. “To put it squarely, as I say in my memoir, the eternal triangle has come to full circle”.* 65 The doomed triangle consists of the Baron Klopstock, his wife and Victor Passé rat, lover to both. Early in the evening they gather in the study and leave world “not to disturb.” Lister frequently moralizes about the tale that he is scripting for them and quotes gothic judgments from Webster and Shirley. He continually turns the expected disaster into rhetoric fashioned for the well-staged plot that he is directing, “Supper, never again”, says Lister, “For them supper no more”*66. By morning, Klopstock kills his wife and Passé rat, and then kills himself.

Movie rights have been arranged, and the household staff, having rehearsed their stories, have been interviewed, photographed and recorded on tape. There is an ominous indication, near the end of the novel that similar servant takeovers could happen all over the world. Clovis, the cook cannot reach the youngest brother, count Klopstock in

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Brazil; the count, according to his butler, is locked in the study with friends, and they are "on no account to be disturbed"*67.

Spark had herself said that the book is 'very pro-servant'. It seems to be pro everything that the social and economic hierarchies usually place at the bottom or on the outside. The comic inversions in the novel seem fantastically to imply that the world could be overturned by mere style and energy, that revolution is a matter of communication between butlers and media, between Switzerland and Brazil, until the worldwide takeover is accomplished. The very slickness of the night's work provides a moral resonance. Life and death are both just a matter of "Style" for Lister. Heloise asks why Victor's two women friends (one turns out to be male in drag) did not wait boldly in the main drive, but instead pulled their car round to the side of the house:

"The answer", says Lister "is that they know their place. They had the courage to accompany their Kinsman on his errand, but at the last little moment lacked the style which alone was necessary to save him. The Baron will arrive, and not see them, not enquire, likewise, the Baroness. No sense, for all their millions."*68 *

No sense, and no style; the latter alone would have prevented the deaths in the library, Lister notes. According to him, people who do not

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68 Ibid. Page no. 7.
"know their place", and who are bold to emulate their employers by wearing their clothes and quoting their poetry will survive. The action seems to prove Lister right.

After the three deaths, the members of the staff recite their rehearsed remarks. What is most notable about Lister and his gang is their in capacity for remorse. Though Lister makes one teasing reference to the war horse in the Book of Job, at first it seems just another of those allusions with which he confuses the listeners. But this moment of biblical reference, conveys more than Lister intends. In job, the war horse takes its place in God’s survey of those prodigious creatures to create that to which no finite mind could reach high enough. Job submits. But among the jet set proprietors and employees alike, vanity has united with and agreed to make new species for which self-knowledge remains irreversibly remote. Thus, the changes in the modern society are shrewdly noted by Spark; pin-pointing the lack of morality and even the lack of fear of God in modern people, ironically and satirically.

**Criminal mishaps of the society:**

In her novel ‘Aiding and Abetting’, Muriel Spark spins an inspired ‘what-if’ scenario on the criminal career of the notorious seventh Earl of Lucan, convicted in absentia in 1974 of hitting his children’s nanny to death and severely wounding his wife, before eluding the police and
leaving the country. It was clear at the time, Spark reminds readers, that “Lucky” Lucan could not have avoided capture unless he was liberally supplied with funds, undoubtedly by other members of the arrogant aristocracy who considered class loyalty more important than justice, and whose sham morality convinced them that they were above the law. There is an incident narrated in the novel, when Lucan’s wife hands over the possessions of the dead nanny to her relatives at the door of the house very carelessly as if nothing serious has happened. In fact, the nanny is murdered mistakenly by Lucan instead of his wife. The entire novel hits the mishaps in the society by several such incidents.

The Earl of Lucan survives for many years in hiding because of his aristocratic friends who aid him out of their class pride. Aiding is considered to be a religious duty and a pious activity in Christian philosophy but here, ironically, Lucan’s friends by their aiding, support a criminal to avoid punishment. When we meet Lucan, in the novel, in fact two Lucans, one real and one fake, both criminals, they are the same arrogant persons without a sense of remorse for their criminal acts and now blackmailing a psychologist for the sake of money. According to the Earl and the aristocracy, the act of killing a nanny is a common thing, not much fuss to be created on the matter except the fact that to a good nanny is a difficult thing those days! For Lucan, getting money from his friends and avoiding punishment was his right and nothing morally wrong about it.
There is another story in the novel of Hildegard Wolf, presently an established psychologist, when the two Lucans meet her. But in her past life, she is a fake stigmatic, Beat Pappenheim, who uses her menstrual blood to fake Christ’s blood, which was shed from real wounds for the salvation of humanity. Beat has a friendly make-up expert who fakes her wounds. She had made use of this blood and tried to act as a spiritual healer. Beat had extracted a lot of fortune from ignorant people like this and running away after that, she is settled in France now as a psychologist. She has a bit of pricking conscience because of her crime and considers it often; but nothing more than that. The blackmailing of the two Lucans compels her to do so. But she is saved in the end, as two of the Lucans are killed in a bizarre way, getting a poetic justice for their criminal acts. All this is narrated in a straight forward but biting satiric way. The entire novel comments on the society which lacks the moral fear and where crimes have become a routine matter of life. The novelist brings out the horrors of modern society and its strange indifference to crimes and morality, in this novel.

**Reality behind the public images:**

In *The Public Image*, Spark depicts as the title suggests, how the thin - textured mask, that is, the public image of people passes for identity. In the worlds of social and political manipulation inhabited by such
characters, the public image becomes extremely important. Here, the main characters accept too thoroughly and without question, the socially available stereotypes of themselves. Spark's most desperate and defeated characters have taken to heart some public image, some cultural stereotype of themselves. As a result, they undertake completely parodic, cardboard quests. The various cliché's projected by the media, and by a culture's expectations about people, become the people. A superficial and brittle public image becomes dangerous.

The public image becomes private or 'internalized' for Fredrick Christopher, a producer and film-script writer. He begins to take himself seriously as a person of "seriousness", as a good-looking cultured man whose talents are not being encouraged by his wife and by ready opportunities. He is envied by his wife Annabel's sudden success as a film star, a success due largely to her well-maintained public image. To her audiences, she is an erotic "Tiger Lady", though she is a fairly simple English woman whose attractive body and minimal acting skills have given her a respected place among Rome's actors, journalists, and film-makers. Fredrick, unlike Annabel, is much more addicted to his part in their combined public façade: "Fredrick found himself rooted deeply and with serious interest in a living part such as many multitudes believe exits: a cultured man without a temperament, studious, sportsman like aristocratic
and a fatherly son of Mother Earth, Annabel's husband". Fredrick is taking to heart cliché's that are centuries old in the popular culture of Western civilization. "Fatherly son of Mother Earth" is the imagery of "home" for the male psyche, and Fredrick has blanketeted himself warmly in the media's exploitation of primary socialization. He accepts this norm of immaturity. Spark's diction is very careful here. Fredrick is living a part that does not exist. He is thus in a horrific condition, for he is "dead" even before he commits his stage suicide.

Fredrick puts together a melodramatic plot, i.e. his own manipulative suicide which will glamorize his despair and take revenge on his wife for having failed, toward him, in her "Mother Earth" role. After inviting a loud, drunken crew to his flat, where they surprise and embarrass his wife with their boisterous party, Fredrick jumps from the scaffolding erected over some excavating work that is being done in caves beneath a church. He plants behind him some carefully written, sentimental, accusatory suicide letters. His purpose is to destroy his wife's public image, and he very nearly succeeds; the story spreads of an "orgy" in progress at the Tiger Lady's house while her loving and sensitive husband leaped to his death. But here, at this instance, Annabel manages the show. After her husband's suicide, she manages a show of grief, gives out the story that Fredrick was pursued by women, chased by them, till he

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leaped from the scaffold to escape. She sidesteps a blackmail attempt, and then abruptly leaves the inquest and the country, choosing a new life and abandoning her lightly held public image.

Eventually, Annabel is freed from various public images of her and understands her true self. Her earlier stupidity in her household life vanishes with her success in films and after that, she even shakes off her false glamorous images and a false life generated out of that. Her new life is symbolized by her love for her baby, Carl. Her new identity is not essentially that of a mother, though this had been part of her official, public image. Her new identity is as a person of possibilities, as someone with new growth ahead of her.

Spark here brings out the realities of the world of films. The public images of these people are heroic, glamorous and ideal but these are just the well-managed shows. The real identities of people wearing these masks are entirely different from their public face. "The Public Image' is a transitional novel in Spark's work. It has the central character of earlier novels that is capable of some moral growth; at the same time, the increasing presence of the artificial, dehumanized world created by the press and by a reciprocating, lazy faith in public images, it points toward the later novels. In these, nearly all characters are like Fredrick in that they take seriously some "public image", some stereotyped caricature of themselves. Many times, her characters become symbolic of popular,
vaguely reformist social motions, not really movements, but sputtering burlesques of people who are keen on self-renewal or who ‘want their equality’. Her later novels often seem to embody her political scepticism. Some of her reformers are rescued; some are left with their egoistic dignity similar to that of Jean Brodie in defeat.

These are some of the important social problems depicted in Spark’s novels. She, with an expert’s hand, uncovers social evils in all of her novels, directly or allegorically, with strokes of humour and hidden satire. But her portrayal of social reality is not merely related to social and political evils. Her canvas is much broader and it encompasses the deep-rooted issues related to human existence and all important dimensions of human life. Spark brings out the psychological problems of her characters, taking the readers to the hidden recesses of their consciousness and presenting their quests and the universal causes of their sufferings. There is also a religious dimension to her novels wherein she handles various issues related to ‘faith’ and also tries to find solutions to the complex human problems through faith, depicting the philosophical realities of life in a metaphysical and mystical way. All these are studied in the next chapters.

“The more fearful this world becomes, as at this moment”, Paul Klee confided to his journal during Word War I, “the more art
becomes abstract"**.  Whatever it’s wider sources, doubtless numerous; Spark’s own plan is stated quite evidently in this statement. "I think my novels are the novels of a poet", Muriel Spark acknowledged in an interview in 1970. She also made clear that she did not want to re-examine terrain covered by prior authors. "Its better", she added as to form, "just to speak in a kind of shorthand"**71. If we agree that the worship and practice of reason mark two signs of classicism in literature, then Muriel Spark may safely be assigned to that camp. Yet her circumstances have imposed an eclectic approach. What makes her art individual is, first, a screened correlation between technical devices and, then, that further stage where craft is subsumed within a larger dimension. She has always proved quite willing to range beyond orthodox mimesis.

Muriel Spark prescribes the holy duo of reason and conscience through her novels. The realities of the public world are portrayed by her wit but with entirely new and enlightened vision. What most of all characterizes her gaze is its benign watchfulness towards the world. She is, in real sense, a creative novelist of the modern age, representing all of its complexities, in her own way, through her art.

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