Muriel Spark and the Political Warfare Executive: The Legacies of Covert Propaganda in Post-War Fiction

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MURIEL SPARK AND THE POLITICAL WARFARE EXECUTIVE: THE LEGACIES OF COVERT PROPAGANDA IN POST-WAR FICTION

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Abstract

From May to October 1944, Muriel Spark was employed by the Political Warfare Executive (PWE), a secret service created by the British government during the Second World War with the mission of spreading propaganda to enemy and enemy-occupied countries. Drawing on untapped archival materials from the Political Warfare Executive Papers (The National Archives, UK), the Imperial War Museum Archive (UK) and the Muriel Spark Papers (McFarlin Library, University of Tulsa, USA), this PhD thesis provides the first major consideration of the legacies of Spark's covert propaganda work in her post-war fiction. It argues that Spark's fiction exposes the workings of PWE propaganda techniques to teach us how not to fall victim to them. This PhD thesis is divided into five main chapters, framed by an introduction and conclusion. The introduction describes Spark's PWE work, explains the methodology and key contributions, and signposts the structure of the chapters that follow. Chapter 1 examines Spark's adoption of the methods of PWE black propaganda to reveal how plausible narratives and myths are fabricated in her novels. Chapter 2 considers Spark's use and moral justification of an ethics of deception in the context of historical states of exception such as the Second World War and the Holocaust. Chapter 3 explores Spark's embrace of the scrambler telephone and the wireless to develop an aesthetics of interruption which seeks to foreground hitherto concealed aspects of experience. Chapter 4 analyses Spark's representation of textual forgery as a source of anarchic creativity capable of sabotaging the authority of the social and political establishment. Chapter 5 investigates Spark's fictional deployment of rumour as both a strategy for collective problem-solving and a weapon for subversion. The conclusion connects Spark's PWE work to contemporary propaganda and makes the case for Spark as an excellent guide to our age of fake news.

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Contents

Illustrations

Abbreviations

Novels by Muriel Spark

C	*The Comforters* (1957)
R	*Robinson* (1958)
MM	*Memento Mori* (1959)
BPR	*The Ballad of Peckham Rye* (1960)
B	*The Bachelors* (1960)
PMJB	*The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie* (1961)
GSM	*The Girls of Slender Means* (1963)
MB	*The Mandelbaum Gate* (1965)
PI	*The Public Image* (1968)
DS	*The Driver's Seat* (1970)
ND	*Not to Disturb* (1971)
HER	*The Hothouse by East River* (1973)
AC	*The Abbess of Crewe* (1974)
T	*The Takeover* (1976)
TR	*Territorial Rights* (1979)
LI	*Loitering with Intent* (1981)
FCK	*A Far Cry from Kensington* (1988)
RD	*Reality and Dreams* (1996)
AA	*Aiding and Abetting* (2000)

Poetry by Muriel Spark

AG	'Authors' Ghosts' (2003)

Short stories by Muriel Spark

FYML	'The First Year of My Life' (1975)

FW	‘The French Window’ (1993)

ST	‘The Small Telephone (1993)

Nonfiction works by Muriel Spark

MC	‘My Conversion’ (1961)

DA	‘The Desegregation of Art’ (1970)

MS	*Mary Shelley* (1988)

CV	*Curriculum Vitae* (1992)

AGC	‘All God’s Creatures’ (1999/2000)

Black propaganda memoirs:

CR	*Comes the Reckoning* (1947) by R.H. Bruce Lockhart

BL	*The Big Lie* (1955) by John Baker White

BB	*Black Boomerang* (1962) by Sefton Delmer

BG	The Black Game (1982) by Ellic Howe

Statement of Copyright

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A Note on Propaganda Terminology

<u>Types of propaganda:</u>

White propaganda: Propaganda which 'comes from a source that is identified correctly' and 'tends to be accurate. […] White propaganda attempts to build credibility with the audience, for this could have usefulness at some point in the future'.

Black propaganda: Propaganda whose 'source is concealed or credited to a false authority and spreads lies, fabrications, and deceptions. […] The success or failure of black propaganda depends on the receiver's willingness to accept the credibility of the source and the content of the message'.

Grey propaganda: Propaganda which is 'somewhere between white and black propaganda. The source may or may not be correctly identified, and the accuracy of the information is uncertain'.

See Garth S. Jowett and Victoria O'Donnell, *Propaganda and Persuasion*, 5th edn (London: Sage, 2012), pp. 17-23.

<u>Other key terms:</u>

Disinformation: '[V]erifiably false information that is shared with an intent to deceive and mislead'.

Misinformation: '[V]erifiably false information that is shared without an intent to mislead'.

Fake news: An umbrella term denoting **'**misleading content disguised as news' which incorporates both disinformation and misinformation.

See RESIST 2 Counter Disinformation Toolkit https://gcs.civilservice.gov.uk/publications/resist-2-counter-disinformation-toolkit/ [accessed 8th August 2022].

For my parents, Miguel and Arsenia

Introduction: Muriel Spark and the Political Warfare Executive

The Political Warfare Executive (PWE) was a secret service created by the British government in 1941 with the mission of spreading propaganda to enemy and enemy-occupied countries. From 7th May to 2nd October 1944, Muriel Spark was employed as 'Duty Secretary' – 'an opaque definition which somehow fitted with the untransparent nature of the work' (*CV*, 152) – at Milton Bryan (Bedfordshire), in the PWE's purpose-built broadcasting studio designed by Sir Edward Halliday and opened in 1943.[1] Spark's recruitment into the PWE appears to have been accidental. In her autobiography *Curriculum Vitae*, she describes how, on her return from Africa, she 'went to the local Employment Bureau in Ladbroke Grove to see about a job', armed with a copy of Ivy Compton-Burnett's *Elders and Betters* (1944) that she had borrowed from the Kensington Public Library the day before (*CV*, 145). The recruitment administrator, 'a sensible-looking middle-aged woman' with 'a file of cards in front of her' which 'represented the jobs available', dutifully collected Spark's completed form (*CV*, 146). However, on noticing that Spark was carrying a book by Compton-Burnett, who she considered to be 'one of the most intelligent women writing in English', the recruitment administrator 'imagined that [Spark] was looking for an interesting job' and offered her 'secret work for the Foreign Office', which would involve '[l]ong irregular hours […] [i]n the country' (*CV*, 146). Spark was then invited to interview with her would-be boss Sefton Delmer – a former *Daily Express* journalist turned propagandist who was employed as 'Director of Special Operations against the Enemy and Satellites ('black')' at the PWE – in the London offices of the PWE, located in the top floor of Bush House, a building known as the headquarters of the BBC Overseas Service (*CV*, 146; *BB*, 103). At her interview, Spark was asked if she had returned from Africa in a convoy, to which she answered: '"I don't know" […] smiling a little' (*CV*, 147). She immediately understood that this was 'an elementary test' in the practice of discretion, for citizens had been 'warned "not to know" about the movements of ships and troops, past and present. Great signs were plastered over the walls of public buildings: "Careless Talk Costs Lives"' (*CV*, 147).

Spark's employment at the PWE 'was probably the result of Delmer's expanding his staff in preparation for Operation Overlord', the Allied invasion of German-occupied Normandy in June 1944.[2] With neither a university degree nor understanding of the German language, Spark was tasked with intelligence gathering for propaganda rather than propaganda writing. Yet 'as a fly on the wall', she 'took in a whole world of method and intrigue in the dark field of Black Propaganda or Psychological Warfare, and the successful and purposeful deceit of the enemy' (*CV*, 147). Spark was responsible for

[1] Martin Stannard, *Muriel Spark: The Biography* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 2009), p. 61; 'Political Warfare Executive Studio, Milton Bryan, Beds', in *Heritage Gateway* <https://www.heritagegateway.org.uk/Gateway/Results_Single.aspx?uid=1401210&resourceID=5> [accessed 16 May 2022].
[2] Stannard, pp. 62-3.

operating a scrambler telephone – a green-painted telephone which made speech signals unintelligible in order to prevent the enemy from eavesdropping – to collect military intelligence. She would take down 'the details of the bombing, the number of planes that had gone out and those (not always all) that had returned' from a spokesman of the returning Allied bombers and pass them on to Delmer (*CV*, 152). Spark was also tasked with answering a nightly call from the Foreign Office newsroom conveying 'general news not yet released for the next day's newspapers' (*CV*, 153). Aided by photographs, maps and local knowledge, Delmer's team would use the information collected from the Allied bombers to build a realistic reconstruction of bomb damage, which could be used to fabricate a plausible narrative. Indeed, PWE propagandists cunningly mixed real facts with believable lies to create 'disruptive and disturbing news among the Germans which will induce them to distrust their government and to disobey it' (*BB*, 108). Such PWE propaganda was disseminated via radio broadcasts, printed materials, and rumours with the aim of damaging morale and encouraging German soldiers and civilians to act against the interests of National Socialism.[3] In this work, the PWE was supported by the Special Operations Executive (SOE), a secret service responsible for conducting intelligence gathering, espionage and resistance organisation in occupied Europe; for example, SOE agents regularly distributed black printed propaganda and rumours, particularly in occupied France.[4]

The creation of the PWE can be framed as part of a larger history of political propaganda as a means of influencing domestic and foreign public opinion. In Soviet Russia, the Bolsheviks closely associated propaganda with education as part of their efforts to indoctrinate a population with low literacy rates. In addition to relying on the cinema, the visual arts, and the performing arts to communicate their views, they also established 'peasant huts' where those citizens 'who could not read themselves were more or less systematically read to'.[5] Italian propaganda under the Fascist Party, in contrast, was primarily concerned with censoring the daily press and rewriting school textbooks with the aim of ensuring children's ideological indoctrination.[6] Additionally, Italian propaganda encouraged fascist youth activities and mass public gatherings, as well as religion and symbols.[7] The Fascist Party also used short-wave broadcasting for foreign propaganda, primarily targeted at Northern Africa.[8] German propaganda under National Socialism was more systematised than its predecessors, and like Italian propaganda, made widespread use of symbols; however, it was primarily characterised by its reliance on wireless transmission and its focus on influencing public opinion abroad.[9] Whilst the British

[3] Stannard, p. 65.
[4] Tim Brooks, *British Propaganda to France, 1940-1944: Machinery, Method and Message* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2007), p. 25.
[5] Bartlett, 31-2.
[6] Bartlett, pp. 36-9.
[7] Bartlett, pp. 39-40.
[8] Bartlett, p. 41.
[9] Bartlett, pp. 43-49.

government had initially relied on the Ministry of Information (MoI), the BBC and the BBC Overseas Service to communicate the British viewpoint at home and abroad, the outbreak of the Second World War prompted a turn to covert propaganda as an additional means to combat Nazi Germany over the airwaves.

The historiography on the PWE is limited and overall tends to cover the complex bureaucratic history of the organisation rather than the specific intellectual contexts and propaganda methods that shaped its campaigns.[10] However, memoirs of PWE work by Sefton Delmer, Ellic Howe, John Baker White and Robert Bruce Lockhart provide more stimulating insights into the workings of the organisation.[11] In *Curriculum Vitae*, Spark also describes briefly the duties of her 'wonderfully interesting' PWE role, but chooses to foreground her walks and bicycle rides in the Bedfordshire countryside, as well as her relationships with colleagues and prisoners of war (POWs) (*CV*, 147). For further information on PWE propaganda campaigns, Spark directs readers to Delmer's second volume of autobiography *Black Boomerang*, 'an account of his wartime adventures of the mind', which is in her opinion 'well worth reading' (*CV*, 148). On the contrary, *Black Boomerang* does not mention Spark, who was then a budding poet rather than celebrated novelist. In fact, Delmer chooses to dedicate his memoir 'to [his] fellow "Black *Men*" – British, German, and American' (*BB*, 5, my emphasis), a revealing word choice that exposes the widespread sexism of the British intelligent services and erases the significant contributions of women to the intelligence services during the Second World War.[12] Spark was evidently aware of her peripheral role within the PWE, as testified by her recurrent use of the phrase 'out of your element' in archival records relating to *The Hothouse by the East River*; however, such a marginal position also enabled Spark to spy on the 'inner circle' and gain surreptitious knowledge of the methods of black propaganda.[13]

[10] See Michael Balfour, *Propaganda in War, 1939-1945: Organisations, Policies and Publics in Britain and Germany* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1979), Charles Cruickshank, *The Fourth Arm: Psychological Warfare 1938-1945* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1981) and David Garnett, *The Secret History of PWE: The Political Warfare Executive, 1939-1945* (London: St Ermin's Press, 2002). A recent exception is Kirk Robert Graham, *British Subversive Propaganda during the Second World War: Germany, National Socialism and the Political Warfare Executive* (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2021).

[11] See Sefton Delmer, *Black Boomerang: An Autobiography: Volume Two* (London: Secker & Warburg, 1962), Ellic Howe, *The Black Game: British Subversive Operations against the Germans during the Second World War* (London: Queen Anne Press, 1988), R.H. Bruce Lockhart, *Comes the Reckoning* (London: Putnam, 1947) and John Baker White, *The Big Lie* (London: Evans Brothers, 1955).

[12] Initially considered unsuitable for intelligence work due to fears that their emotional nature would lead them to prioritize personal over national loyalties, by December 1944, however, 6,750 women worked at Bletchley Park and the numbers of women in intelligence grew throughout the war. See Kerry Johnson and John Gallehawk, *Figuring it Out at Bletchley Park, 1939-1945* (Redditch: Book Tower Publishing, 2007), p. 9.

[13] Box 28, Folder 11, *The Hothouse by the East River*, 'Secret War Work notes', n.d., McFarlin Library, University of Tulsa, USA.

More than forty years after her PWE work, Jeanne Devoize and Claude Pamela Valette asked Spark if 'the war and the work in the Foreign Office' – a frequent cover name for employment at the PWE – 'had an influence on what [she] wrote' during her subsequent career as a novelist, a question which she assuredly answered in the affirmative:

> I think so because we were doing propaganda, inventing lies, which suited me all right. Inventing lies to mix up with truth. Mixing it all up and then putting it out for the German soldiers to swallow, to try and say one thing and then it was not true at all, or half of it was true. Anything to demoralize the German troops, in France, on the radio. And so, of course, that job suited me all right. It was *inventive* [my emphasis].[14]

Spark's reply reveals her understanding of the close kinship between propaganda and fiction insofar as they are both deeply implicated in the art of 'inventing lies'. Although Spark's autobiography occasionally reveals a sense of unease concerning her involvement in PWE deception operations, implicitly criticising Delmer's reaction to the meat-hook deaths of the conspirators against Hitler in the 1944 July Plot, it is evident that she welcomed her PWE work as a formative experience. Indeed, as Victoria Stewart notes, it provided Spark with a valuable 'apprenticeship in authorship, in judging the balance between concealment and revelation' that would significantly shape the style, sources and themes of her subsequent literary work.[15] Yet Spark's experience of working for the PWE still remains shrouded in secrecy, and therefore, largely overlooked in critical studies of her oeuvre.

This doctoral thesis draws on heretofore untapped archival materials from the Political Warfare Executive Papers (FO 898, The National Archives [TNA], UK), the Imperial War Museum Archive (Imperial War Museum [IWM], UK), the Muriel Spark Archive (National Library of Scotland [NLS], UK) and the Muriel Spark Papers (McFarlin Library, University of Tulsa, USA) to offer the first major consideration of the legacies of Spark's intelligence work for the PWE on her literary work. A key argument of this thesis is that Spark's fiction might be read as an extended attempt to atone for her PWE employment by exposing the methods of propaganda and instructing her readers on how not to fall victim to them. Bringing together cultural history, biography and literary criticism, this interdisciplinary study provides a new understanding of Spark's fiction through the lens of her wartime engagement with deception and rumour. I suggest that this is a crucial framework for interpreting aspects of Spark's fiction – such as, for example, her use of sound technologies, forgeries, and rumours – that have not heretofore seemed to fit neatly into existing criticism of her novels.

This doctoral thesis makes three key contributions to the understanding of Spark as one of the major post-war British novelists. First, it demonstrates that Spark's propaganda work substantially

[14] Jeanne Devoize and Claude Pamela Valette, 'Muriel Spark - b. 1918', *Journal of the Short Story in English*, 41 (2003), 243-54 <http://jsse.revues.org/328>

[15] Victoria Stewart, *The Second World War in Contemporary British Fiction: Secret Histories* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2011), p. 22.

shaped her development as a novelist, throughout providing specific examples and extended readings of her work that clearly substantiate this claim. Second, in doing so, it presents Spark as a more incisive historical and political commentator than she has been hitherto believed to be in the received critical scholarship on her work. My understanding of 'political', however, does not presuppose partisanship; Spark was not party political and disapproved of unconditional loyalty to any political ideology. Her political stance can therefore only be read between the lines of her own novels, particularly *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie*. This novel demonstrates Spark's fierce opposition to fascism and strong commitment to democracy, understood as a political system in which all citizens have an equal right to form and voice their own opinions. I suggest that Spark's fictional exposure of lies and encouragement of critical thinking as a means of preventing readers from falling prey to disinformation firmly establish her political credentials as a democrat, thereby contributing to widening the category of the political writer beyond simply the party-political writer. Third, it situates Spark as part of a group of women writers including Elizabeth Bowen and Christine Brooke-Rose, whose roles in the British intelligence services at the Ministry of Information (MoI) and Bletchley Park, respectively, considerably influenced their formal and thematic approaches to fiction and poetry.[16] By reinserting Spark's secret work into the history of the PWE, this PhD thesis not only acts as a powerful corrective to *Black Boomerang*'s sexism, but adds significantly to the emerging scholarship on the legacies of wartime intelligence in the work of women writers.[17] Although this thesis draws substantially on archival records to make evidence-based claims, the paucity of biographical information on Spark's role at the PWE means that certain claims must necessarily remain speculative. These have been clearly identified as such throughout this study.

By foregrounding the legacies of Spark's propaganda work on her fiction, this doctoral thesis does not seek to neglect or discredit previous scholarship on Spark as a Catholic, Jewish, Scottish, postmodern, existential, or experimental writer, but rather, offers a complementary perspective that serves to illustrate Spark's lasting relevance in our current age of fake news. Spark's fascination with

[16] Bowen worked as an informer on neutral Ireland for the Ministry of Information (MOI), and was entrusted with writing reports on public opinion of the Second World War. See Megan Faragher, 'The Form of Modernist Propaganda in Elizabeth Bowen's *The Heat of the Day*', *Textual Practice*, 27 (2013), pp. 49-68 and Patricia Laurence, 'Art and Intelligence', in *Elizabeth Bowen: A Literary Life* (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019), pp. 191-221. Brooke-Rose was employed in codebreaking at Bletchley Park during the Second World War, an experience she describes in her fictional autobiography *Remake* (Manchester: Carcanet, 1996). See Victoria Stewart, *The Second World War in Contemporary British Fiction: Secret Histories* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2011) and Natalie Ferris, 'savage warnings and notations': The Women Charting New Sensory Terrains in the Wake of Intelligence Work, *Modernist Cultures*, 16 (2021), 546-67.
[17] See MLA 2021 Special Session on 'Women Writers, WWII Intelligence and Post-War Literature', organised and chaired by Beatriz Lopez, with papers by Patricia Laurence, Natalie Ferris, and Beatriz Lopez, as well as the 'Women, Modernism, and Intelligence Work' special issue of *Modernist Cultures*, edited by Natalie Ferris and Simon Cooke (2021).

deception and rumour is brought into fruitful dialogue with her many eclectic influences, including the *nouveau roman*, Mary Shelley and the Scottish Border ballad, among many others. Although Spark remains the primary focus of this study, her preoccupations are often contextualised alongside those of her contemporaries, including John Fowles, Iris Murdoch, George Orwell, Wallace Stevens, and Evelyn Waugh. In doing so, I present Spark as a writer attuned to local and global influences, historically and politically minded, and most importantly, strongly committed to democratic values.

1. Existing Scholarship

Spark's early critics primarily categorised the author as part of a historical tradition of Catholic satire – featuring writers such as Evelyn Waugh and Graham Greene – that was seen to ridicule the pretentiousness of secular claims to knowledge when set against eternal theological truths as a result of her conversion to Catholicism in 1954.[18] According to this framework, Spark's novels are regarded as moral narratives in which an omnipotent author behaves like an indifferent God-like figure, mercilessly playing with the destinies of its caricatured characters. Spark's fiction certainly engages with theological themes; for example, *The Comforters* and *The Only Problem* revisit the Biblical Book of Job and *The Mandelbaum Gate* explores the question of religious identity. However, theological considerations of Spark, valuable as they undoubtedly are, have become so preeminent in critical scholarship of her work that, as James Bailey notes, they have hindered the development of new perspectives, including 'analysis of the significance of the social and historical contexts and concerns of her fiction'.[19]

Bryan Cheyette, for example, criticises Spark's reduction to a mere moralist, highlighting the manifold ways in which her hybridity – in particular, her half-Jewishness – serves to challenge essentialist views of identity and disrupt social norms.[20] Additionally, Spark's ability to destabilise the conventions of the novel form has also led to her consideration as an early postmodern novelist by

[18] See Karl Malkoff, *Muriel Spark* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1968); Malcolm Bradbury, 'Muriel Spark's Fingernails', in *Critical Essays on Muriel Spark*, ed. by Joseph Hynes (New York: G.K. Hall & Co, 1992 [1972]), pp. 187-93; Patricia Stubbs, *Muriel Spark* (London: Longman, 1973); Allan Massie, *Muriel Spark* (Edinburgh: Ramsay Head Press, 1979); Ruth Whittaker, *The Faith and Fiction of Muriel Spark* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1982); Velma Bourgeois Richmond, *Muriel Spark* (New York: Frederick Ungar, 1984); Alan Bold, *Muriel Spark* (London: Methuen, 1986); Dorothea Walker, *Muriel Spark* (Boston, MA: Twayne Publishers, 1988); Norman Page, *Muriel Spark* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1990) and Rodney Stenning Edgecombe, *Vocation and Identity in the Fiction of Muriel Spark* (Columbia, MO: University of Missouri Press, 1990). Peter Kemp's *Muriel Spark* (London: Paul Elek, 1974) is a notable exception.
[19] James Bailey, *Muriel Spark's Early Fiction: Literary Subversion and Experiments with Form* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2021), p. 17.
[20] Bryan Cheyette, *Muriel Spark* (Tavistock: Northcote House, 2000), p. 65.

literary theorists such as Patricia Waugh and Brian McHale.[21] According to Waugh, Spark adopts metafiction – the explicit and overt exposure of fiction as artificial in order to investigate 'the problematic relationship between life and fiction' – as a means of parodying 'the *structural* conventions and motifs of the novel itself'.[22] Nevertheless, Spark is ultimately committed to realism, choosing to retain, for example, 'the omniscient-author convention', even though she does not use it 'benevolently to signpost the reader's way through the text, but to express a disturbing authority whose patterns are not quite so easy to understand'.[23]

Scottish literature critics, who initially regarded Spark as a peripheral figure in the Scottish national canon because she did not reside in Scotland and her writing did not engage with the question of Scottish national identity, have recently demonstrated an increasing interest in charting Spark's Scottish influences. Gerard Carruthers, for example, has explored the legacies of James Hogg, Calvinism, the Scottish Border ballad, and the Scottish understanding of education, as outlined in George Davie's *The Democratic Intellect* (1961), on Spark's fiction.[24] In particular, recent efforts to internationalise Scottish literature have situated Spark in a more central position in Scottish letters. [25] For example, the major exhibition 'The International Style of Muriel Spark' (National Library of Scotland, 2018) foregrounded Spark's cosmopolitanism by devoting equal attention to her time in Africa, London, New York, and Italy. Such an 'international turn' has substantially contributed to raising Spark's popularity and profile in the field of Scottish literature.[26]

The publication of *Theorizing Muriel Spark: Gender, Race, Deconstruction* (2002), edited by Martin McQuillan, offered new perspectives on Muriel Spark from a post-structuralist standpoint. In his introduction, McQuillan attacks those studies of Spark that approach the author through a Catholic lens because, in his view, it engenders 'doctrinal criticism, which reads Spark's novels for moral and theological content, reading her texts like the penny catechism'.[27] Yet McQuillan's insistence on

[21] See Patricia Waugh, *Metafiction: The Theory and Practice of Self-Conscious Fiction* (London: Routledge, 1984) and Brian McHale, *Postmodernist Fiction* (London: Routledge, 1987).
[22] Waugh, *Metafiction*, p. 4.
[23] Waugh, *Metafiction*, p. 74.
[24] See Gerard Carruthers, '"Fully to Savour Her Position": Muriel Spark and Scottish Identity', *MSF Modern Fiction Studies*, 54 (2008), 487-504.
[25] See Carla Sassi, 'Muriel Spark's Italian Palimpsests', *Textual Practice*, 32 (2018), 1615-32. Another example of the 'international turn' in Scottish literature is the AHRC-funded project 'Remediating Stevenson: Decolonising Robert Louis Stevenson's Pacific Fiction through Graphic Adaptation, Arts Education and Community Engagement' led by Michelle Keown, which examines the legacies of Robert Louis Stevenson's Pacific writing.
[26] The 3rd World Congress of Scottish Literatures, held at Charles University, Prague (Czech Republic) from 22nd to 26th June 2022, featured for the first time a panel dedicated to Muriel Spark, chaired by Carla Sassi, with papers by Attila Dósa, Beatriz Lopez and Kaiyue He.
[27] Martin McQuillan, 'Introduction: I Don't Know Anything about Freud: Muriel Spark Meets Contemporary Criticism', in *Theorizing Muriel Spark: Gender, Race, Deconstruction*, ed. by Martin McQuillan (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002), pp. 1-31 (p. 2).

pigeonholing Spark as an author primarily preoccupied with critical theory makes him equally guilty of practising the 'doctrinal criticism' he claims to denounce. As Patricia Waugh notes, McQuillan's interview with Spark, which serves as a conclusion to the volume, 'encourage[s] her to play down her Catholicism and to play up her social and political engagement, as if the two were necessarily in contradiction'.[28] In fact, McQuillan's attempt to categorise Spark as either a modernist or postmodernist is derailed by Spark herself, who playfully refuses to confirm her unconditional adherence to any such movement: 'Maybe Post-modernist; I don't know about Modernism. […] They say postmodernist, mostly, whatever that means'.[29]

The Muriel Spark special issue of *Modern Fiction Studies* edited by David Herman in 2008 – and later expanded into the edited volume *Muriel Spark: Twenty-First-Century Perspectives* (2010) with additional essays by Patricia Waugh and Bran Nicol – succeeded in placing Spark in a wider canvas. By considering Spark as both a Scottish and world author, usefully contextualising her writing in post-war culture and providing new readings of *The Mandelbaum Gate*, *The Driver's Seat*, *Memento Mori*, *The Abbess of Crewe*, and *Loitering with Intent*, this landmark publication cemented Spark's reputation as a leading British post-war novelist. More recently, a centenary special issue of *Textual Practice* – The Prime of Muriel Spark: A Centenary Retrospect (2018) – has provided new perspectives on her work, with an emphasis on her eclectic range of influences, which include Italy, the Scottish ballad tradition, and industrial psychology, among many others. This special issue has recently been followed by the edited volume *The Crooked Dividend: Essays on Muriel Spark* (2022) – the result of a Muriel Spark symposium organised to celebrate her centenary in 2018 – which offers more fresh insights into Spark's life and work, foregrounding her political interest in surveillance, and in particular, the Watergate scandal.

Since her centenary, several monographs seeking to place Spark in a wider intellectual canvas have been published. Cairns Craig's *Muriel Spark, Existentialism, and the Art of Death* (2019) considers the influence of existentialism – and, in particular, the Danish thinker Søren Kierkegaard – in the themes of Spark's novels. Craig persuasively argues that Spark's embrace of Christian existentialism and her rejection of atheistic existentialism significantly shaped Spark's religious commitments and artistic innovations. In his study *The Nouveau Roman and Writing in Britain After Modernism* (2019), Adam Guy briefly considers the impact of the *nouveau roman* on Spark's writing. Guy's insights are significantly expanded by James Bailey's *Muriel Spark's Early Fiction: Literary Subversion and Experiments with Form* (2021), which identifies key examples of literary experimentation in her early

[28] Patricia Waugh, 'Muriel Spark and the Metaphysics of Modernity: Art, Secularization and Psychosis', in *Muriel Spark: Twenty-First-Century Perspectives*, ed. by David Herman (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2010), pp. 63-93 (p. 82).
[29] Martin McQuillan, '"The Same Informed Air": An Interview with Muriel Spark', in *Theorizing Muriel Spark: Gender, Race, Deconstruction*, ed. by Martin McQuillan (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002), pp. 210-29 (p. 216).

writing, focusing on both the influence of the nouveau roman and metafiction. Crucially, Bailey draws on Spark's archives at the National Library of Scotland and the McFarlin Library (University of Tulsa, USA) to provide new insights into Spark's experimental approach to fiction-writing. Additionally, several critics such as James Smith (2018), Adam Piette (2018), and Simon Cooke (2021) have published journal articles and book chapters that consider the influence of Spark's intelligence work on a selection of her novels, adding to the existing scholarship of Marina Mackay (2008) and Victoria Stewart (2011) on this subject. The remainder of this section will provide a detailed assessment of these studies.

In his biography of Muriel Spark, Derek Stanford – Spark's former lover and literary collaborator – suggested a connection between Spark's work for the PWE and her fictional output, noting that '[t]he hush-hush game played by her and her colleagues [at Milton Bryan] might have come intact out of one of her own novels'.[30] Picking up on Stanford's passing remark, Marina Mackay was the first critic to draw on Spark's intelligence work as a lens through which to examine her fiction. In her journal article 'Muriel Spark and the Meaning of Treason', Mackay persuasively contends that Spark's early fiction is concerned with 'what makes calculated treachery legitimate' and traces Spark's interest in treason back to her intelligence work with POWs at Milton Bryan, where 'treasonous personnel […] was used to impersonate loyalty, to mimic the pro-German stance that it was attempting to overturn'.[31] Spark's precarious boundary between allegiance and disloyalty, Mackay concludes, resists fixed understandings of morality in favour of understanding 'realities that are plural, contingent, provisional, and amenable to creative transformation.'[32] Mackay's study has been an important influence on Chapter 2, which explores Spark's 'ethics of deception' – her acknowledgement that expressions of disloyalty and even deception might be morally obligatory in the context of states of exception such as the Second World War and the Holocaust.

In her seminal study *The Second World War in Contemporary British Fiction: Secret Histories* (2011), Victoria Stewart draws on Spark's account of her PWE work in *Curriculum Vitae* to analyse the significant resonances of her intelligence role in *The Hothouse by the East River* (1973), a novel shaped by the intrusion of secret work memories on the present. Additionally, Stewart frames Spark's secret work alongside that of Christine Brooke-Rose, who was employed at Bletchley Park and whose fictional autobiography, *Remake* (1996), similarly attempts to make sense of the after-effects of the secrecy that such work demanded. In doing so, Stewart expertly traces the histories of wartime intelligence that have shaped Spark and Brooke-Rose's careers as novelists, starting a genealogy of

[30] Derek Stanford, *Muriel Spark: A Biographical and Critical Study* (Fontwell: Centaur Press, 1963), p. 43.
[31] Marina Mackay, 'Muriel Spark and the Meaning of Treason', *MFS Modern Fiction Studies*, 54 (2008), 505-22 (p. 505, p. 511).
[32] Mackay, 'Muriel Spark and the Meaning of Treason', p. 521.

women writers in the intelligence services that more recent criticism has sought to expand.[33] Other scholars have studied the influence of aspects of Spark's intelligence work on selected novels. In 'Covert Legacies in Postwar British Fiction' (2018), James Smith persuasively argues that Granny Barnacle's rumour-mongering from within her geriatric ward in *Memento Mori* is reminiscent of 'one of British black propaganda's preferred methods of operating', that of spreading rumours 'to undermine morale from within'.[34] Furthermore, Smith places confirmation bias – 'the same psychological principle that informed much of PWE's black broadcasting' – at the root of the elderly characters' responses to the bizarre phone calls that recurrently issue reminders of death.[35] Chapter 5 considerably expands Smith's work on Spark and rumours, developing a typology of rumour which helps to elucidate Spark's understanding of this oral form as both a means of collective problem-solving and a subversive weapon.

In 'Muriel Spark and the Politics of the Contemporary' (2010), Adam Piette persuasively contends that Spark uses intelligence plots to 'raise questions about the costs of social change and the new forms evil takes in the political sphere of the twentieth century'.[36] In his analysis of *The Hothouse by the East River*, for example, Piette exposes the legacies of wartime deception in 'the damaging pop psychology of psychoanalysis, in the advertising dreams of commodity culture, in the vulgar, self-seeking and godless hatreds between members of the nuclear family'.[37] For Piette, Spark's 'ethical drive', which can be traced back to her employment in black propaganda during the Second World War, comes to the fore in her fiction as a means to come to term with the 'traumatic residues of the war' and establish 'chronotopic present[s]' that resist the delusions of propaganda and facilitate the negotiation of 'the social, political and religious vectors of selfhood'.[38] Chapters 3-5 of this PhD thesis explore sound technologies, forgeries and rumours precisely as means through which these 'chronotopic present[s]' can be enacted, offering new insights that expand on Piette's argument.

In his more recent journal article 'Muriel Spark and Fake News' (2018), Piette provides a nuanced consideration of the role of the media in the fabrication and transmission of fake news in *The Only Problem*. He argues that media representations crucially foster Harvey's fake conceptualisation of his wife as 'vulnerable, innocent, charming despite the news being generated by the violence her gang has wreaked, and by the press's own fake news rumourmongering presentation of him as evil genius',

[33] See Natalie Ferris and Simon Cooke (eds.) Women, Modernism, and Intelligence Work Special Issue of *Modernist Cultures* (2021).
[34] James Smith, 'Covert Legacies in Postwar British Fiction', in *British Literature in Transition, 1940–1960: Postwar*, ed. by Gill Plain (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019), pp. 337-52 (p. 346).
[35] Smith, 'Covert Legacies', p. 347.
[36] Adam Piette, 'Muriel Spark and the Politics of the Contemporary', in *The Edinburgh Companion to Muriel Spark*, ed. by Michael Gardiner and Willy Maley (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2010), pp. 52-62 (p. 59).
[37] Piette, 'Muriel Spark and the Politics of the Contemporary', p. 60.
[38] Piette, 'Muriel Spark and the Politics of the Contemporary', pp. 61-2.

secretly organising and funding his wife's criminal activities in France.[39] Piette foregrounds how 'the press, the police and public opinion create fake stories for their own comfort and in order to put pressure on vulnerable dissenters' and places such disciplinary behaviour at the root of Effie's emergence as 'media goddess of fake news and psychological warfare', whose allure 'matches the manipulative redefinitions projected onto victims by both the terrorist disinformation machine and the media as state apparatus'.[40] Piette's essay usefully presents Spark as a writer fascinated by, yet critical of, the power of fake news to modify our behaviour by tapping into our unconscious dreams and desires. In the Conclusion, I build on Piette's work by developing the connections between Spark's treatment of fictional deception and the rise of contemporary fake news, particularly in the context of the Russo-Ukrainian War.

Finally, Simon Cooke's 'A "world of method and intrigue": Muriel Spark's Literary Intelligence' (2021) approaches Spark's intelligence work from a biographical perspective, drawing on archival materials from the National Library of Scotland and the McFarlin Library (University of Tulsa, USA) to read *The Hothouse by the East River* 'less as a re-enactment than as a subversion of the logics of disinformation'.[41] Cooke's article attempts to frame Spark's novels as forms of spy fiction by reading archival materials between the lines and rearticulating ideas previously considered by Stannard and Stewart. However, his conclusion that Spark's fiction fulfils the opposite aim of propaganda, offering 'the unsettling truth rather than strategic lies, piercing rather than manufacturing a fabric of delusional beliefs' is perceptive.[42] My doctoral thesis explores the propaganda methods by which Spark achieves this aim, drawing on a wide range of examples from her novels.

Although the aforementioned studies by Mackay, Stewart, Piette and Cooke have evidently influenced my work on the legacies of covert propaganda in Spark's fiction, this is the first study to draw on historical archival materials from the PWE Papers to tease out the specific propaganda methods that Spark borrowed and fictionally rendered in her subsequent career as a novelist. Furthermore, it does not merely cover the Spark novels that more evidently resonate with an 'intelligence' reading, but offers new readings of virtually all of her novels, as well as selected short stories and poems, from this perspective, thereby firmly establishing the centrality of Spark's intelligence work to her development as a writer. Finally, it recognises the formative importance of Spark's intelligence work, but also situates Spark in a wider intellectual canvas, framing her PWE experience as just one of her many eclectic influences. As a result, Spark emerges from this PhD thesis as a historically and politically committed

[39] Adam Piette, 'Muriel Spark and Fake News', *Textual Practice*, 32 (2018), 1577-91 (p. 1584).
[40] Piette, 'Muriel Spark and Fake News', p. 1584, p. 1587.
[41] Simon Cooke, 'A "world of method and intrigue": Muriel Spark's Literary Intelligence', *Modernist Cultures*, 16 (2021), 488-508 (p. 488).
[42] Cooke, p. 494.

writer, critical of the power of propaganda to influence public opinion and intent on instructing readers on how to resist it.

This PhD thesis is the major single-author case study emerging from the Leverhulme Trust-funded project ‘The Political Warfare Executive, Covert Propaganda and British Culture’, which investigates the PWE’s impact on modern British literary culture.[43] It considers the representation of the PWE in fiction and memoirs, as well as the legacies of the PWE in the writing of the novelists Evelyn Waugh, David Garnett, and Graham Greene; the poets John Betjeman and Stephen Spender; the Bloomsbury writer Quentin Bell; the travel writer Freya Stark; and the historian A. J. P. Taylor. Furthermore, it considers how the propaganda and rumours initiated by the PWE have continued to evolve and spread after the PWE was disbanded. Drawing on a wide range of sources, including the PWE’s surviving archives, the personal papers of authors who worked for the PWE, and the records of other agencies such as the BBC and the SOE, the members of the project collectively offer new readings of how such psychological warfare practices have influenced the themes and techniques of post-war literature. In doing so, the project throws new light on the legacies of the PWE on modern culture and reveals how earlier liberal-democratic societies have addressed the practice of psychological warfare and disinformation.

2. Archival Materials

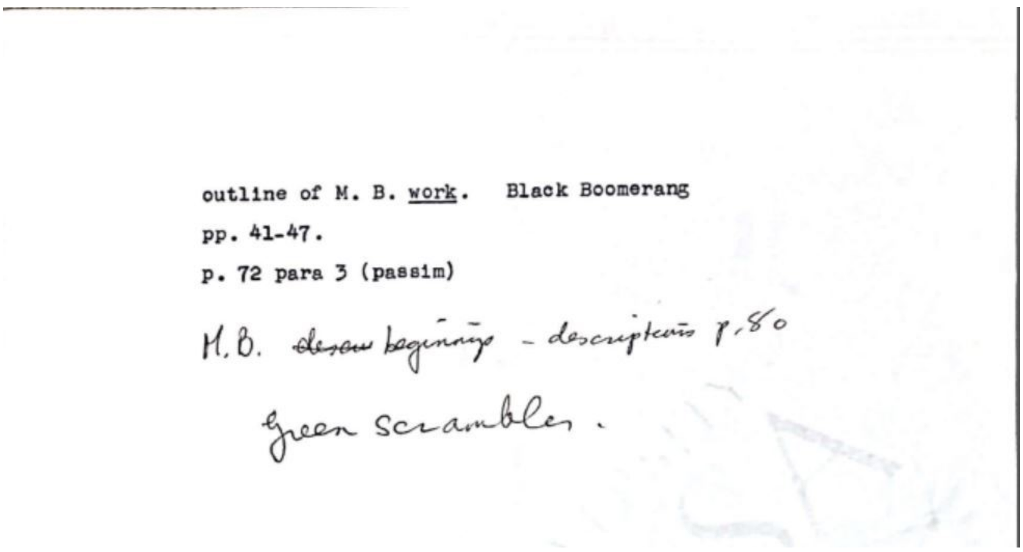
The surviving papers of the PWE do not identify Spark either by name or by code name; there are no personnel records available and, even if there were, it is unlikely that Spark’s name would feature prominently given her secretarial role.[44] However, the PWE papers – in particular, the lectures delivered to would-be propagandists at the PWE Training School, which I discuss in more detail in Chapter 1 – offer a fascinating insight into the theory and practice of black propaganda which often resonates with Spark’s own fictional techniques. The PWE Papers are therefore the main archive on which this PhD thesis draws, though it is also underpinned, to a lesser extent, by archival materials from the Imperial War Museum (IWM), the Muriel Spark Archive (NLS) and the Muriel Spark Papers (McFarlin Library).

[43] For further information on the project, see <https://writersandpropaganda.webspace.durham.ac.uk/>. Recent project publications include Guy Woodward, ‘“Conducting his own Campaigns”: Evelyn Waugh and Propaganda’, *The Review of English Studies*, 73 (2022), 144-64, James Smith and Guy Woodward, ‘Anglo-American Propaganda and the Transition from the Second World War to the Cultural Cold War’, in *The Bloomsbury Handbook to Cold War Literary Cultures*, ed. by Greg Barnhisel (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2022), pp. 149-62, and Jo Fox, ‘“Fake News” – The Perfect Storm: Historical Perspectives’, *Historical Research*, 93 (2020), 172-87.
[44] Most of the PWE archive was deliberately destroyed immediately after the Second World War, and what survives, possibly a tenth of its original contents, is generally disorganised (*BG*, 7).

Spark's own personal records and correspondence, preserved at the NLS, offer little insight into her PWE employment, as her signing of the Official Secrets Acts would have prohibited the dissemination of information concerning her secret work, even though we know that she was paid £4 17s 6d a week.[45] An inventory of the books she kept at her Oliveto home (Italy), however, reveals a writer much more preoccupied with historical and political affairs than she has heretofore believed to be. In contrast to the materials preserved at the NLS, the notebooks, research folders and manuscripts held at the McFarlin Library have proved more useful for elucidating the nature of Spark's intelligence work and its fictional legacies.[46]

The most significant discoveries at the McFarlin Library are Spark's notes on Delmer's *Black Boomerang* and Spark's notes on her memories of PWE work, both compiled in preparation for writing *The Hothouse by the East River*, the novel that most evidently draws on her experience of working for the PWE during the Second World War.[47] Spark's notes on Delmer's *Black Boomerang* prove her careful reading of his memoir and suggest the possibility that *The Hothouse by the East River* and Spark's autobiographical account of her involvement in black propaganda in *Curriculum Vitae* may have been coloured by Delmer's own wartime narrative.[48] Furthermore, Delmer's account most likely enabled Spark to gain an understanding of PWE methods beyond the silo in which she worked, thus possibly sparking her subsequent fictional reflection on the role of memory in confronting past ethical dilemmas (see, for example, *The Hothouse by the East River* and *A Far Cry from Kensington*).

[45] Stannard, p. 61.
[46] I was unable to visit the McFarlin Library and have relied on digital copies of archival materials that I received at a late stage due to Covid-19. I intend to engage more thoroughly with these materials when revising my PhD thesis into a monograph.
[47] Box 28, Folder 11, *The Hothouse by the East River*, 'Secret War Work notes', n.d., McFarlin Library, University of Tulsa, USA.
[48] Box 28, Folder 11, *The Hothouse by the East River*, 'Secret War Work notes', n.d.



outline of M. B. work. Black Boomerang

pp. 41-47.

p. 72 para 3 (passim)

M.B. ~~[illegible]~~ beginnings – descriptions p.80

Green scrambler.

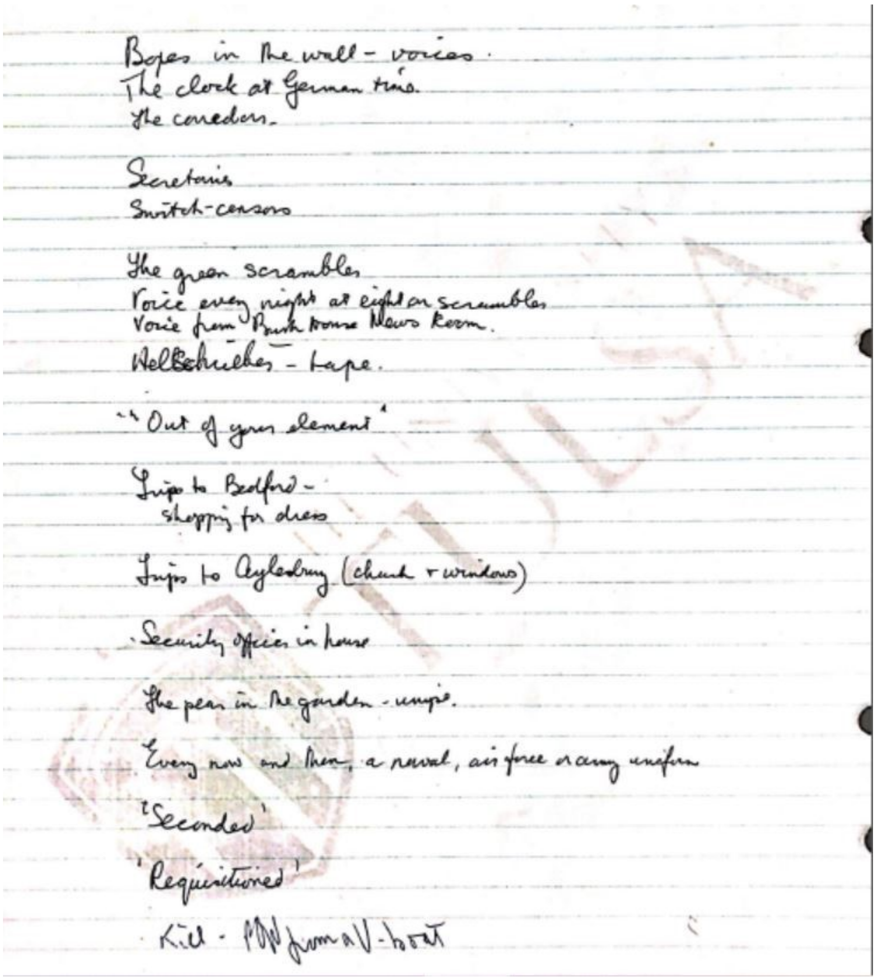
Figure 1: Evidence of Spark's reading of Delmer's *Black Boomerang* © McFarlin Library, University of Tulsa, USA.

Although the inventory of the books stored in the cellar of Spark's Oliveto home does not list *Black Boomerang* – she most likely borrowed it or lent her own copy to friends –, it features a copy of Delmer's *Trail Sinister: An Autobiography: Volume One* (1961), which demonstrates Spark's historical interest in the upbringing and journalistic work of her former boss in Imperial and Weimar Germany. In addition, Spark kept a copy of *Philby: The Spy Who Betrayed a Generation* by Bruce Page, a biography of the British intelligence officer and double spy who disclosed British secrets to the Soviets during the Second World War and the Cold War.[49] Spark's reading on Philby not only testifies to her fascination with the world of wartime intelligence and espionage, but also to her more specific interest in the complexities of treason and conflicting loyalties, which I discuss in Chapter 2.[50]

Spark's notes on her memories of PWE work reveal the author's 'auditory imagination' – 'the inherent dialogicality of outer and inner speech, voices, emphatically pluralised, oriented and responsive, brought into being by visible and invisible interlocutors' – at work.[51] They allude to specific voices and linguistic expressions that defined her daily life at Milton Bryan: the 'voice every night at

[49] Philby was an instructor at Beaulieu, an SOE 'finishing school' where 'agents and saboteurs who had already completed their commando and parachute training' could gain 'intellectual gloss', in 1940-1. He was tasked with producing 'a syllabus on the techniques of underground propaganda' and, in preparation, 'paid friendly visits in search of ideas to the "experts" in "black propaganda", such as Richard Crossman and Sefton Delmer, at their headquarters at Woburn Abbey.' Philby developed 'the notion of the "subversive rumour", which, he insisted, should be both concrete and plausible.' See Patrick Seale and Maureen McConville, *Philby: The Long Road to Moscow* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1973), pp. 129-31.
[50] Acc. 10607/261, Storage of Property and Library (Includes Lists of Books), 1980-8, Muriel Spark Archive, National Library of Scotland, UK.
[51] Patricia Waugh, 'Muriel Spark's 'informed air': The Auditory Imagination and the Voices of Fiction', *Textual Practice*, 32 (2018), 1633-58 (p. 1641).

eight on scrambler' and the 'voice from Bush House News Rooms' were accompanied by the continuous presence of switch-censors, as well as security and military staff, in an atmosphere where 'seconding' and 'requisitioning' were the order of the day.


Boxes in the wall – voices.
The clock at German time.
The corridors.

Secretaries
Switch-censors

The green scrambler
Voice every night at eight on scrambler
Voice from Bush House News Room.
[illegible] – tape.

"Out of your element"

Trips to Bedford –
shopping for dress

Trips to Aylesbury (church + windows)

Security officer in house

The pears in the garden – unripe.

Every now and then, a naval, air force or army uniform

'Seconded'

'Requisitioned'

Kiel – POW from a U-boat

Figure 2: Spark's descriptive notes on Milton Bryan © McFarlin Library, University of Tulsa, USA.

Furthermore, Spark also wrote a list of the people she remembered from Milton Bryan, seemingly in the form of a 'list of characters' – similar to those she compiled ahead of writing her novels – that identifies Delmer as 'Chief (D)', Karl Robson – Delmer's deputy – as 'Karl R.' (*BB*, 83), her co-worker Marcelle, a number of POWs such as the 'small dark, communist' known as 'Otto', who Spark would later encounter working as a waiter at a London restaurant (*CV*, 157), as well as some Jewish collaborators, all described in quirky detail.

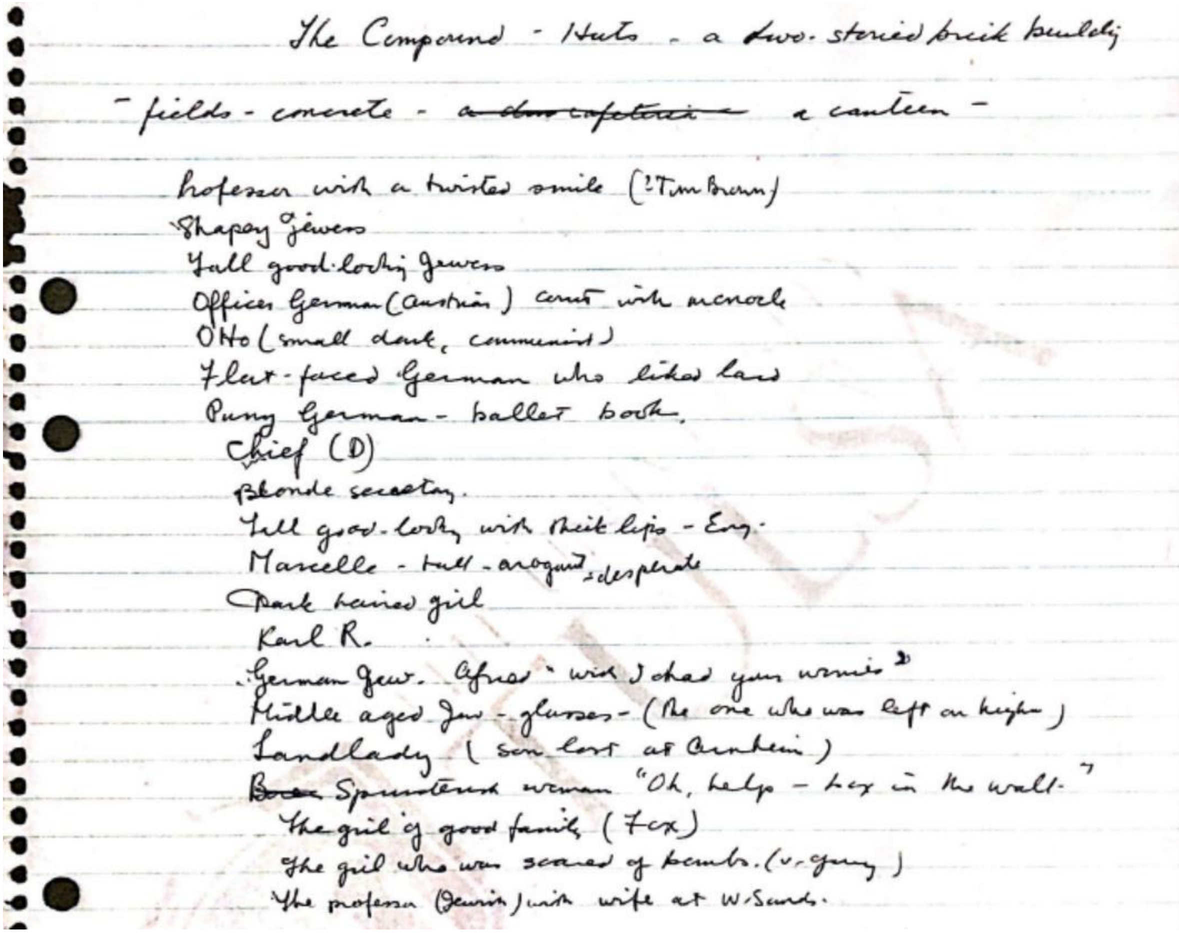

The Compound - Huts - a two-storied brick building
- fields - concrete - ~~a ... cafeteria~~ a canteen -
Professor with a twisted smile (?Tim Brown)
Sloppy Jewess
Tall good-looking Jewess
Officer German (Austrian) count with monocle
Otto (small dark, communist)
Flat-faced German who liked laws
Puny German - ballet book.
Chief (D)
Blonde secretary.
Tall good-looking with thick lips - Eng.
Marcelle - tall - arrogant, desperate
Dark haired girl
Karl R.
German Jew. Afraid "wish I had your worries"
Middle aged Jew - glasses - (the one who was left on high-)
Landlady (son lost at Arnhem)
~~Bran~~ Spinsterish woman "Oh, help - key in the wall."
The girl of good family (Fox)
The girl who was scared of bombs. (v. young)
The professor (Jewish) with wife at W. Sands.

Figure 3: Spark's descriptive notes on her Milton Bryan colleagues © McFarlin Library, University of Tulsa, USA.

Collectively, these materials throw new light on Spark's engagement with the methods of black propaganda during her time at Milton Bryan and demonstrate the deep imprint that her secret work left on her imagination. Intelligence plots abound in her novels, but even those novels that do not seem to be concerned with intelligence work at all, often weave some of the methods of propaganda into their plots. This PhD thesis draws on these newly discovered archival materials to explore Spark's intelligence influences and their legacies in her literary work.

3. Structure

This PhD thesis is divided into two parts. Part I examines the methods of PWE black propaganda, as described by archival documents, historical accounts, and memoirs, and analyses Spark's fictional adoption and exposure of such methods in her fiction.

Chapter 1 suggests that Spark employs the fictional equivalent of the methods of black propaganda to examine the creation of plausible narratives and myths in her writing. It draws primarily on the PWE lectures, which were produced to provide guidance to would-be propagandists on best practice, and carefully examines a wide range of examples from across her fiction. The first section considers Spark's deployment of verifiable facts, targeting, covert motives, chronological disruption, and repetition to build plausibility in her novels. The second section investigates Spark's interest in how plausible narratives can become solidified into myths, with a focus on the representation of Spark's foremost mythologizers – Miss Brodie in *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie*, Sister Alexandra in *The Abbess of Crewe*, and Hulbert Mallindaine in *The Takeover*. Spark's mythmaking is also contextualised and compared with that of John Fowles' *The Magus* (1965). I argue that Spark's exposure of the fictional equivalent of the methods of propaganda provides a political and moral antidote to totalitarian thinking by presenting reality as necessarily contingent, and, therefore, open to external contestation and democratic debate.

Chapter 2 contends that Spark's fiction resembles black propaganda insofar as it adopts and morally justifies an ethics of deception in the context of historical states of exception such as the Second World War and the Holocaust. I begin with a discussion of Spark's negotiation of national and personal loyalties at times of national conflict before turning to the pedagogic potential of democratic propaganda to resist totalitarian ideologies, which I argue becomes particularly significant in states of exception. I conclude with an exploration of Spark's fictional rendering of the complexities of encountering foreign nationals, using Iris Murdoch's *The Flight from the Enchanter* (1956) as a point of comparison. Through examples from *The Comforters*, *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie*, *The Mandelbaum Gate*, *The Driver's Seat*, *The Hothouse by the East River*, *Loitering with Intent* and *A Far Cry from Kensington*, I argue that Spark's PWE work is at the root of her fictional embrace of an ethics of deception, defined as a situational ethics that recognises the need to prioritise the moral imagination when exercising political judgement, even if such ethics might appear morally suspect at times. In doing so, I demonstrate that the moral framework of Spark's fiction moved progressively and substantially from religion to politics, as she considered how best to respond to the afterlives of ethically troublesome historical events.

Part II examines how the distinctive features of the modes of transmission of propaganda – sound technologies, printed materials and rumours – are deployed by Spark as a means to contest the authority of propagandistic discourse.

Chapter 3 argues that Spark's fictional representation of sound technologies – the scrambler telephone and the wireless – embraces a Brechtian-like 'alienation effect' – what I call an aesthetics of interruption – as an epistemological tool to challenge entrenched beliefs and encourage critical thought. The first section of the chapter discusses Spark's representation of scrambled telephony. I draw on Evelyn Waugh's *Vile Bodies* (1930) as a useful point of comparison with Spark's late modernist fiction and suggest that, whereas Waugh views the telephone as a detached medium, Spark embraces the telephone as a deeply human instrument, capable of providing new, and potentially transformative, ways of transmitting affect, as testified by Spark's little known children's short story 'The Small Telephone'. The second section of the chapter draws on archival materials that document PWE intrusion operations to suggest that Spark fictionally adopts this propaganda technique. Although Spark's aesthetics of interruption are targeted at the individual rather than the social mass, they are not a magic bullet for social revolution, but require the conscious exercise of scepticism and reflection. PWE broadcasting provided German citizens with suggestive material to help them rethink their entanglement with autocratic mass communications at a time when the freedom to think independently was gravely at risk. Through analysis of the fictional deployment of scrambled telephony and wireless intrusion in her fiction, I contend that Spark's aesthetics of interruption fulfils a similar role.

Chapter 4 suggests that Spark's work for the PWE sharpened her awareness of the radical potential of creative forgeries such as black propaganda printed materials to provide enemy readers with alternative perspectives in the expectation that they would be unwittingly moved to advance the Allied cause. However, unlike fiction, PWE printed materials sought to foster a narrow interpretation of textual evidence, and the obscure nature of their authorship enabled the preservation of anonymity. I contend that Spark's involvement in PWE propaganda enhanced her understanding of the distinction between art and propaganda in relation to authorship; the artist must necessarily remain accountable for their creation whereas the propagandist does not. In fact, forgeries devalue the identity of the propagandist, who, much like the postmodern author, does not appear to matter at all. I suggest that Spark's desire to resurrect the author at a time when post-structuralism, and in particular, the authorship debate of the 1960s, had strived precisely to kill once and for all the Romantic notion of the author as source of originality not only complicates, to a certain extent, her categorisation as a 'postmodern' novelist, but also proves important for understanding the need for transparency and accountability in our age of fake news, as discussed in the Conclusion.

Chapter 5 opens with Spark's overlooked children's short story, 'The French Window', which uses rumour to provide a warning against the deliberate spread of fabricated rumours and foreground the serious consequences of taking unverified information at face value. It considers Spark's treatment of four types of rumour: 'folk wisdom' rumour and 'speculative wisdom' rumour – both spontaneous rumours – and 'institutional subversion' rumour and 'reputation assassination' rumour – both planted rumours. I argue that the 'folk wisdom' rumour seeks to help her female readers to navigate their personal and professional lives and that the 'speculative wisdom' rumour exposes how unequal power relationships force those in vulnerable social positions to rely on inference to decipher the world around them. In contrast, I suggest that the 'institutional subversion' rumour serves to undermine the power of social and cultural institutions and that the 'reputation assassination' rumour acts as a group management strategy for the creation and destruction of authority within the group. I explore the kinship of rumour with other forms of oral culture such as the Scottish Border ballad and the aphorism which are also central to Spark's writing. However, I suggest that rumours differentiate themselves from such forms of oral culture because, even though they originally arise from the human need for 'collective problem-solving', they can be hijacked for the spread of disinformation aiming to modify public behaviour in the service of individuals or institutions.

Finally, the conclusion offers a somewhat more speculative exploration of the resonances of PWE propaganda and Spark's fictional exposure of the methods of propaganda in our age of fake news. Drawing on contemporary studies of disinformation by Thomas Rid and Peter Pomerantsev, it presents Spark as a still vitally relevant historical and political commentator, able to anticipate the threat that disinformation poses to democracy and offer valuable insights on how to resist dogmatic thinking and cultivate critical scepticism. However, Spark also understood that disinformation lures us precisely because it taps into the human need to confirm our existing beliefs. Furthermore, Spark's satire on the lengths characters go to maintain deceptions and self-deceptions is a vital source of comedy in her fiction. I suggest that Spark's intelligence work for the PWE educated her on the persistent erosion of facts in modern culture and the role of media technologies in the spread of disinformation – insights that make her an excellent guide to help us navigate our own age of fake news.

Collectively, the chapters of this PhD thesis show that Spark's work for the PWE is not only central to her own development as a novelist, but also to her development as a perceptive observer and anatomist of her own cultural context. Therefore, Spark's fiction is a valuable source for both literary scholars and cultural historians seeking to understand Second World War and post-war propaganda. In particular, the ethical dilemmas concerning the art of deception that Spark investigates in her fiction foreshadow the erosion of truth and democratic accountability brought about by our age of fake news. In this context, Spark's advocacy of art and fiction as pedagogic tools to enlarge our perspective and guide our judgement has become more important than ever. By exposing how facts can be manipulated and encouraging readers to think independently, Spark's fiction promotes the continuation of a much-needed climate of democratic debate.

1. The Art of Deception: Constructing Plausible Narratives and Myths with the Methods of Black Propaganda

Introduction

In her autobiography *Curriculum Vitae*, Spark describes her employment at the PWE, which involved writing down intelligence provided by recently returned aircrews. She took 'the details of the bombing, the number of planes that had gone out and those (not always all) that had returned' and passed them on to Sefton Delmer (*CV*, 152). Propaganda can be defined as 'the systematic dissemination of information, especially in a biased or misleading way, in order to promote a political cause or point of view', but Spark's intelligence gathering demonstrates that it is often based on truth (or, at the very least, the appearance of truth).[1] Delmer's unit of the PWE was entrusted with the production of subversive black propaganda, information of disputable credibility whose 'source is concealed or credited to a false authority'.[2] PWE broadcasts to Nazi Germany, for example, used the voices of German POWs to disguise themselves as German even though they originated from Britain. Unlike the white propaganda created by the BBC European Services, which strived for accuracy and made no secret of its allegiance to Britain, black propaganda was deniable by the state and often employed unsavoury methods to sabotage the enemy. Delmer's team cunningly mixed real facts with believable lies to create plausible narratives capable of encouraging Germans 'to distrust their government and to disobey it' (*BB*, 108). The fact that Delmer tried out on Spark a fabricated story about the Allies hiring Italian interpreters to question their POWs signals her acquaintance with the art of constructing plausible narratives (*CV*, 150). Indeed, Spark's PWE experience significantly influenced her view of literal truth as elusive and historically contingent, even a constructed effect, particularly at times of conflict. Therefore, Spark's fiction often explores the complex threshold between truth and lies, with a focus on mythologizer figures who wish to impose their fanciful understandings of the world on reality.

This chapter suggests that Spark employs the fictional equivalent of the methods of black propaganda to examine the creation of plausible narratives and myths in her writing. Drawing on the PWE lectures, which were produced to instruct would-be propagandists on best practice, and a wide range of examples from across her fiction, the first section explores Spark's deployment of verifiable facts, targeting, covert motives, chronological disruption, and repetition to build plausibility in her novels. The second section investigates Spark's interest in how plausible narratives can become solidified into myths, with a focus on the representation of Spark's foremost mythologizers – Miss

[1] 'Propaganda', in *The Oxford English Dictionary* [online], <https://www-oed-com.ezphost.dur.ac.uk/view/Entry/152605> [accessed 23 March 2022].
[2] Garth S. Jowett and Victoria O'Donnell, *Propaganda and Persuasion*, 5th edn (London: Sage, 2012), p. 18.

Brodie in *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie*, Sister Alexandra in *The Abbess of Crewe*, and Hulbert Mallindaine in *The Takeover*. I argue that Spark's exposure of such fictional strategies provides a political and moral antidote to totalitarian thinking by presenting reality as necessarily contingent, and, therefore, open to external contestation and democratic debate.

1. Theorising Plausibility: From Plato to Post-Postmodernism

Plausibility can be defined as 'the quality in an argument, statement, etc., of seeming reasonable or probable'.[3] It was first discussed in Greek literary theory by Plato, who introduced the influential concept of mimesis as artistic representation of the physical world. This understanding of art as image of the material world – itself an inferior representation of the metaphysical realm – entails a major separation between literature and reality. According to Plato, 'the tragic poet is an imitator, and therefore, like all other imitators, he is thrice removed from the king and from the truth...'[4] Since art imitates appearances rather than truth, Plato concludes that art is bound to remain implausible, and rejects all fictions as lies:

> The poet is like a painter who [...] will make a likeness of a cobbler though he understands nothing of cobbling; and his picture is good enough for those who know no more than he does, and judge only by colours and figures.[5]

In contrast, Aristotle argues for the existence of fictionality as a unique realm which cannot be examined according to truth or falsehood. He believes that 'it is not the function of the poet to relate what has happened, but what may happen', and posits poetry as a higher literary form than history because 'poetry tends to express the universal, history the particular'.[6] Therefore, good fictional representations are able to provide alternative visions of the world from an aesthetic distance, bringing intellectual and emotional knowledge to the reader.

Despite Aristotle's early embrace of the notion of fictionality, literary historians such as Catherine Gallagher, Michael McKeon and Lennard J. Davis have noted that, before the 18th century, novels often attempted to conceal their imaginary status under the guise of verisimilitude, acting as factual or allegorical accounts which claimed historical accuracy.[7] As long as narratives seemed

[3] 'Plausibility', in *The Oxford English Dictionary* [online], <https://www-oed-com.ezphost.dur.ac.uk/view/Entry/145464> [accessed 30 April 2019].
[4] Plato, *The Republic*, trans. by Benjamin Jowett, 3rd edn (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1888), p. 597.
[5] Plato, *Republic*, p. 601.
[6] Aristotle, *Poetics*, trans. by S. H. Butcher, 3rd edn (London: Macmillan, 1902), 1451a-1451b.
[7] Whereas Gallagher places the rise of fiction alongside the development of the character as nobody in particular, McKeon regards the novel as a development of romance which resulted from an epistemological shift from historical truth to mimetic truth and Davis contends that the 'news-novel matrix' (a mixture of journalism and scandalous writing) enabled the legitimisation of the novel as a new literary form. See Catherine Gallagher, 'The Rise of Fictionality', in *The Novel, Vol. I: History, Geography, and Culture*, ed. by Franco Moretti (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006), pp. 336-63; Catherine Gallagher, *Nobody's Story: The Vanishing Acts of Women Writers in the Marketplace,*

credible (i.e. they did not feature supernatural elements), they were considered referential and capable of making truth claims. However, in the early 18th century, the rise of the novel was accompanied by the emergence of fiction as a distinct discursive mode different from both truth and falsity, which allowed a movement from 'the singular truth of factuality to another truth of simulation, and thus to an acceptance of verisimilitude as constituting a form of truth'.[8] By the mid-18th century, novel reading had become subject to what Robert Newsom terms the 'antinomy of fictional probability' – the logical oddity arising from experiencing a realist fiction as true (i.e. plausible) despite being untrue (i.e. fictional).[9] Newsom identifies Ian Watt's faith in the accuracy of fictional representations as the main shortcoming of his 'formal realism', since fiction seeks to explore precisely the difficulties in attaining knowledge.[10] The novel may well be 'anxious to see as much of reality as possible', but 'the anxiety is made poignant precisely by the novel's sensitivity to the precariousness of the project'.[11] Spark's own engagement with plausibility aligns more closely with Newsom than with Watt, for it does not entail acceptance of the novel as an inherently verisimilar form. In fact, she dismisses formal realism in favour of an understanding of reality as both deeply bizarre and subject to manipulation. She not only 'treat[s] the supernatural as if it was part of natural history', but is also fascinated by how fictions can be made to look real, and realities can be exposed as fictions.[12]

In addition to literal (or historical) truth, which is accessed through reason, Spark's Catholicism leads her to believe in a spiritual dimension of truth – including metaphorical truth, moral truth, anagogical truth, and most importantly, absolute truth, which can only be apprehended through faith. Like Aquinas, Spark is an ontological realist whose idea of truth reconciles reason and faith as 'only different degrees of intensity of participation in the divine light of illumination and different measures of absolute vision'.[13] Her writing often explores the relationship between the physical and spiritual realms and she addresses her fiercest satire to those characters that are unable to see an otherworldly

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1670–1820 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994); Michael McKeon, *The Secret History of Domesticity: Public, Private, and the Division of Knowledge* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2005) and Lennard J. Davis, *Factual Fictions: The Origins of the English Novel* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1996).

8 John Frow, *Character and Person* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), pp. 111-2.

9 Robert Newsom, *A Likely Story: Probability and Play in Fiction* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1988), p. 10.

10 Newsom, p. 167. 'Formal realism' can be defined as the premise that the novel is 'a full and authentic report of human experience, and is therefore under an obligation to satisfy its reader with such details of the story as the individuality of the actors concerned, the particulars of the times and places of their actions, details which are presented through a more largely referential use of language than is common in other literary forms' (p. 32). See Ian Watt, *The Rise of the Novel: Studies in Defoe, Richardson and Fielding* (London: Pimlico, 2000).

11 Newsom, p. 167.

12 James Brooker and Margarita Saá, 'Interview with Dame Muriel Spark', *Women's Studies,* 33 (2004), 1035-46 (p. 1036).

13 John Milbank and Catherine Pickstock, *Truth in Aquinas* (London and New York: Routledge, 2001), p. viii.

dimension beyond materiality. Despite her belief in absolute truth, Spark is keenly aware of the fact that people often attempt to manipulate truth for their own purposes. Reacting against the false dichotomy of realism versus experimentalism which has characterised discussions of mid-century literature, Spark's distinctive style combines 'a self-reflexive focus on novelistic technique, including modes of metafictional play, with a probing investigation of the moral, psychological, and institutional dimensions of human conduct'.[14] She admired the work of French writer and literary theorist Alain Robbe-Grillet and incorporated elements of the *nouveau roman* – particularly its distrust of omniscience and causality – into her fiction.[15] Yet Spark retains a commitment to historical realism, rather than the formal realism advocated by writers such as Kingsley Amis, William Cooper and C.P. Snow, in her negotiation between 'a wish to represent various aspects of post-war reality and a recognition of the artistic difficulties thereby entailed'.[16] Consequently, Spark's fiction strives to offer 'representations that are plausible by virtue of their rootedness in social reality'.[17]

In a discussion of free will with James Brooker and Margarita Saá, Spark described our lives as 'these pictures that you have in childhood [in which] [y]ou have the general outline […] and you fill it in according to taste'.[18] Patricia Waugh has brought this idea to the study of Spark's fiction, arguing that she lays bare the conventions of realism without delegitimizing the mode. In other words, she assumes 'an *a priori* reality which can to a large extent be taken for granted, but which is flexible enough to accommodate fictional departures from its norms'.[19] It is precisely these fictional departures which have led to her characterisation as a postmodern writer, for whom 'one thing doesn't necessarily lead to another inevitable thing, although it does lead to something else in actual fact'.[20] Like Sandy Stranger in *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie*, Spark is fascinated with 'making patterns with facts' and continuously explores the ways in which facts (real or imagined) can be shaped into endless plausible narratives (*PMJB*, 71). She had already been honing this skill during her girlhood in Edinburgh, when

[14] David Herman, '"A Salutary Scar": Muriel Spark's Desegregated Art in the Twenty-First Century', MFS Modern Fiction Studies, 54 (2008), 473-86 (pp. 473-4). Whereas Rubin Rabinovitz and Bernard Bergonzi argue that British literature of the mid-century shows a return to realism in reaction to the perceived exhaustion of modernist experimentalism, David Lodge offers a more optimistic analysis of the mid-century indecisiveness toward both realism and experimentalism, retaining hope for the realist novel as a literary form. In contrast, Andrzej Gasiorek advocates a re-assessment of realism as historical (rather than formal), capable of incorporating the experimental trends of authors such as Muriel Spark, Iris Murdoch and William Golding, who draw attention to the uncanny nature of reality. See Rubin Rabinovitz, *The Reaction against Experiment in the English Novel, 1950-1960* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1967); Bernard Bergonzi, *The Situation of the Novel*, 2nd edn (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1979); David Lodge, 'The Novelist at the Crossroads', *Critical Quarterly*, 11 (1969), 105-132 and Andrzej Gasiorek, *Postwar British Fiction: Realism and After* (London: Edward Arnold, 1995).
[15] McQuillan, '"The Same Informed Air"', p. 216.
[16] Gasiorek, p. 17.
[17] Gasiorek, p. 183.
[18] Brooker and Saá, p. 1044.
[19] Waugh, *Metafiction*, p. 116.
[20] McQuillan, '"The Same Informed Air"', p. 216.

she ‘used to write letters to herself from boy friends, and hide them down the sofa so her mother would find them. She’d think they were real and be horrified’.[21] But it was her secret work for the PWE which provided a masterclass in the fabrication of plausible narratives for conveying a point of view dressed as truth for mass deception.

In the post-war period, this idea of the contingency of truth, first associated with the philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche, was theoretically developed by Jean-François Lyotard as the basis for his definition of postmodernism. According to Lyotard, the postmodern era is characterised by an ‘incredulity toward metanarratives’, those overarching narratives used to legitimise the Kantian idea of the independence of art, the rational self, universal justice and the objectivity of science.[22] From the 1970s, postmodern intellectuals such as Lyotard adopted Walter Benjamin’s argument that Western foundational modern metanarratives are to blame for the dangerous aestheticization of politics – a view of politics through the lens of aesthetic worth which disregards any social concerns – which contributed to the rise of fascism (see pp. 43-4).[23] Instead, they advocated the adoption of a self-conscious and pluralistic mode of artistic expression as the means to prevent imaginative structures leaking into and assuming the guise of material reality.[24] Borrowing Wittgenstein’s notion of ‘language games’, which denotes the heterogeneity of linguistic rules, Lyotard argued for the replacement of singular metanarratives with numerous micronarratives able to govern the internal practices of particular communities but lacking truth claims outside their particular language game.[25] For Spark, facts are true if they can stand rigorous processes of verification, but she acknowledges that the very act of accumulating, arranging, and narrating facts can lead to falsification. Indeed, her fiction is obsessed with ‘the illicit acquisition and deployment of information’, epitomised in exemplary fashion in the figure of the blackmailer.[26] From Georgina Hogg in *The Comforters* to Lord Lucan in *Aiding and Abetting*, blackmailers not only threaten other characters with the disclosure of private information, but often resort to blatant lies to conceal their mischief.

In the age of Trump, Brexit and the Russo-Ukrainian War, which has witnessed a revival of propaganda techniques for the crafting of plausible narratives, it has become harder than ever to agree on what constitutes truth. Following Derrida’s theorisation of deconstruction as a critical tool to question the relationship between language and meaning, Nietzsche’s insistence on the impossibility of any single account of truth to occupy a privileged position seems to have resulted in a greater acceptance

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[21] Alex Hamilton, ‘Alex Hamilton Interviews Muriel Spark’, *The Guardian*, 8th November 1974, p. 10.
[22] Jean-François Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1984), p. xxiv.
[23] Walter Benjamin, ‘The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction’, in *Illuminations*, ed. by Hannah Arendt and trans. by Harry Zorn (London: Pimlico, 1999), pp. 211-35 (p. 244).
[24] Lyotard, p. 60.
[25] See Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, trans. by G. E. M. Anscombe (Oxford: Blackwell, 1958).
[26] Mackay, ‘Muriel Spark and the Meaning of Treason’, p. 507.

of a generalised epistemological relativism.[27] In various attempts to move beyond this critical paralysis, however, literary scholars of the 1980s and 1990s endlessly proclaimed the end of postmodernism.[28] Yet the resurgence of fake news, with its appearance of truth becoming more real than truth itself, seems to signal the continuation (rather than the demise) of the cultural and political phenomenon of the postmodern.[29] In *Post-Postmodernism or, the Cultural Logic of Just-in-Time Capitalism*, Jeffrey T. Nealon brings up to date Fredric Jameson's Marxist analysis of postmodernism, postulating post-postmodernism as 'an intensification and mutation within postmodernism' resulting from the '"new economies" (post-Fordism, globalization, the centrality of market economics, the new surveillance techniques of the war on terrorism, etc.) and their complex relations to cultural production' at a time when 'capitalism seems nowhere near the point of its exhaustion'.[30] In this context, the market logic of post-postmodernism seems incapable of fostering the basic pragmatic trust needed to build consensus around social justice issues.[31] In this context, Spark's emphasis on biopolitical and economic manipulation can be seen to foreshadow the (strong) post-postmodernism which considers the false as 'based on "a decision of nontruth" that nevertheless "produces effects of truth"'.[32] However, this does not mean that her work unproblematically accepts falsity. Rather, it makes a stark distinction between truth and lie, which are distinguishable through reason, and exposes the harmful myths constructed by mythologizers who attempt to impose their imaginative patterns on reality. As Spark remarked in her interview with Frank Kermode: 'I don't claim that my novels are truth – I claim that they are fiction, out of which a kind of truth emerges. […] [W]hat I write is not true [...] in fact if we are going to live

[27] See Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, trans. by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976).
[28] See Linda Hutcheon, *The Politics of Postmodernism* (London and New York: Routledge, 1898); John Frow, *Time and Commodity Culture: Essays in Cultural Theory and Postmodernity* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997) and John McGowan, 'They Might Have Been Giants', in *Postmodernism: What Moment?*, ed. by Pelagia Goulimari (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2007), pp. 92-101.
[29] Steven Connor argues that the ethical turn of postmodernism, influenced by the work of philosopher Emmanuel Levinas, has led to its propagation to unlikely disciplines such as law, religious studies and performance studies, thus demonstrating postmodernism's potential for re-invention. In contrast, Jeffrey T. Nealon argues that postmodernism has mutated into post-postmodernism in an attempt to engage with the mass economy of 21st-century capitalism. See Steven Connor, 'Postmodernism Grown Old', in *Cul'tura 'Post': At the Crossroads of Cultures and Civilisations*, ed. by Maria K. Popova and Vladimir V. Strukov (Voronezh: Voronezh State University Press, 2005), pp. 55-72 and Jeffrey T. Nealon, *Post-Postmodernism or, the Cultural Logic of Just-in-Time Capitalism* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2012).
[30] Nealon, p. ix, p. 15.
[31] Ihab Hassan postulates a postmodern aesthetic of trust as a way to accommodate multiple truths without denying truth itself. See Ihan Hassan, 'Beyond Postmodernism: Toward an Aesthetic of Trust', in *Beyond Postmodernism: Reassessments in Literature, Theory, and Culture*, ed. by Klaus Stierstorfen (Berlin and New York: Walter de Gruyter, 2003), pp. 199-212.
[32] Nealon, p. 162. Michel Foucault defines the biopolitical as a new late-18th century technology of power which regulates the processes of birth, death, production and illness within populations rather than individuals. See *The History of Sexuality, Volume 1: The Will to Knowledge*, trans. by Robert Hurley (London: Penguin, 1998), p. 139.

in the world as reasonable beings, we must call it lies'.[33] Fiction has a grain of truth, Spark claims, but can become dangerous when it attempts to pass as empirical reality and make truth claims about the world.

In the 1960s, Hannah Arendt had already warned of the perils of thoughtlessness when confronting such fictions because it occludes morality and produces indifference towards those who are different from ourselves. In her attempt to create a new humanism, attuned to both the universal and the concrete, she argues for the necessity to confront difference in order to exercise a well-balanced political judgement.[34] Her influential study *The Origins of Totalitarianism* defines the perpetrators of totalitarianism as 'people for whom the distinction between fact and fiction (i.e., the reality of experience) and the distinction between true and false (i.e., the standards of thought) no longer exist'.[35] Spark's testing of the limits between fact and fiction in her creation of plausible narratives can be seen as a reaction against the mid-century totalitarian regimes which emotionally appealed to group thinking in order to impose their delusional views on reality. Spark's fiction powerfully warns us of the dangers of succumbing to the seductions of dangerous political myths and reminds of the need to remain sceptical of unverified information to exercise good judgement.

2. Storytelling for Mass Deception: The Crafting of Plausible Narratives

2.1 Verifiability and Use of Evidence

PWE agents were tasked with creating plausible narratives capable of engaging people's willingness to believe in order to damage German morale, so the incorporation and use of true facts which would stand verification was crucial to their propaganda work.[36] At the beginning of the war, they often struggled to locate reliable and up-to-date intelligence, having to rely on the press and radio to craft their civilian-focused black propaganda.[37] But Delmer's intelligence collaboration with the Admiralty, his possession of a Hell-Schreiber receiving set which had carelessly been left behind by the DNB London correspondent, and the questioning of prisoners of war significantly improved the flow and quality of information (*BB*, 73-90). Propagandists were aware that, if they were to succeed at all, access to the so-called German state of mind and the latest news items from Germany was a basic necessity. Delmer frequently drew attention to this need for accuracy: 'we must never lie by accident, or through

[33] Frank Kermode, 'Muriel Spark's House of Fiction', in *Critical Essays on Muriel Spark*, ed. by Joseph Hynes (New York: G.K. Hall, 1992), pp. 29-32 (p. 30).
[34] Lewis P. Hinchman and Sandra K. Hinchman, 'In Heidegger's Shadow: Hannah Arendt's Phenomenological Humanism', *The Review of Politics*, 46 (1984), 183-211 (p. 185).
[35] Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (Cleveland and New York: Meridian Books, 1958), p. 474.
[36] Cruickshank, p. 60.
[37] Cruickshank, p. 61.

slovenliness, only deliberately' (*BB*, 92). His team studied German newspapers carefully to find the names and addresses of real people, building up a 'file of personalities' which would provide the 'characters' to populate their deceptive stories (*BB*, 67).

Spark would later borrow this technique when compiling 'character list[s]' that described her characters' features to help her build their personalities in her novels.[38] She also carried out meticulous research of the historical backgrounds to her novels, managing to evoke plausible plots and characters with a minimal amount of detail. Like a good propagandist, she assigned great importance to the authenticity of facts around which she could build a plausible story. In a 1987 interview with Sara Frankel, she recognised being 'very particular: you know, supposing I said the fifteenth of August, 1952, it was raining, well I do look it up to see if it was raining at that spot on that day. [That kind of detail is important] because it's authentic. And then within that realistic framework I can do what I like with the unreal'.[39] This idea is shared by film director Tom Richards in Spark's *Reality and Dreams* when discussing the casting of actors: '"Plausibility, my dear man," said Tom, "is what you aim for as a basis for a film. Achieve that basic something, and you can then do what you like. You can make the audience go along with you, anywhere, everywhere"' (*RD*, 39). This approach is most evident in Spark's 'historical novels'. *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie*, for example, realistically evokes the atmosphere of 1930s Edinburgh as Spark would have known it, portraying Miss Brodie as one of the many spinsters whose sweethearts had died in the First World War and documenting the dangerous rise of fascism. *The Girls of Slender Means* moves into the 1940s to paint a portrait of wartime London dominated by the Blitz and food rationing whilst conveying the jovial and fast-paced lives of the girls, who are just glad to live another day. Although the fictional representation of realistic detail has been central to the emergence of the novel as a literary genre, Spark is more interested in its relevance for the practice of deception. Accurate detail, Spark suggests, is at the root of persuasion because it prompts recipients to take for granted the truthfulness of the overall message, including claims that would otherwise have been perceived as suspicious, but are able to gain credibility by association (see discussion of Alain Robbe-Grillet's *false note* and its resonance with PWE propaganda in pp. 31-2). In addition, fabricated claims seek to conform to the existing beliefs of the recipient, which further facilitates their acceptance as truth. Indeed, propaganda – and I would suggest, fiction – is suggestive insofar as it 'cannot create something out of nothing' and must instead 'build on a foundation already present in the individual'.[40]

Kapka Kassabova's introduction to the Polygon edition of Spark's *Territorial Rights*, however, highlights the implausibility of three facts in the novel, providing 'no explanation other than hurriedness

[38] Brooker and Saá, p. 1042.
[39] Sara Frankel, 'An Interview with Muriel Spark', *Partisan Review*, 54 (1987), 443-57 (p. 451).
[40] Jacques Ellul, *Propaganda: The Formation of Men's Attitudes*, trans. by Konrad Kellen and Jean Lerner (New York: Vintage Books, 1973), p. 36.

for the dissonance of her Bulgarian references'.[41] Such implausible oversight resembles that of Delmer's forged Himmler postage stamps, which had presumably been ordered by Himmler ahead of his rise to power but prematurely issued by mistake. That such a blunder could have taken place within the flawless Nazi bureaucratic machine was highly unlikely and Delmer regretted inventing this story, which he admitted was 'utterly beyond the bounds of possibility' and 'entirely unconvincing', thus illustrating the real-life dangers of fabricating implausible stories (*BB*, 186).

True facts are, however, insufficient for a plausible narrative to appear credible unless it is supported by evidence. In the preface to *Curriculum Vitae*, Spark insists on her reliance on material and testimonial proof to corroborate her life story: 'I determined to write nothing that cannot be supported by documentary evidence or by eyewitnesses; I have not relied on my memory alone, vivid though it is' (*CV*, 11). Likewise, her fictional characters are often preoccupied with proving the truth of their deceptive fictions. In her debut novel *The Comforters*, once Laurence's grandmother, Louisa Jepp, confesses that she is indeed the leader of a diamond gang and we learn the gang's method of smuggling (dressing up as pilgrims intending to visit religious shrines, hiding the diamonds in plaster figures and rosary beads so as to get through customs), she notes that she 'made Mervyn and Andrew visit the shrines properly, in case they were watched' (*C*, 101). In the case of *Robinson*, the deceptive planting of evidence is explored through the contrived disappearance of Robinson, who carefully drops his blood-stained items along the path: 'at the head of the dip leading to the Furnace [lava pit], we saw more of Robinson's clothes, another jacket of his, dark tweed, his brown corduroy trousers, his underclothes' (*R*, 101). By doing so, he attempts to make the plane crash survivors stranded on his island believe that he has been murdered, yet his implausible distribution of the clothing leads one of the survivors, January Marlow, to assume that they '"must have been planted by someone. […] "They would not be scattered about in quite such an obvious manner if they had been dropped accidentally"' (*R*, 102). These scenes from Spark's first two novels demonstrate that no story is ever indisputable, even if it appears to be backed up by proof, and therefore critical thinking must remain a moral obligation.

Delmer assigned great importance to the provision of evidence in support of plausible narratives, a common procedure in black propaganda. In Delmer's words, 'Germans wanted to believe ill of their Nazi Party overseers and we gave them the "facts" with which to back up their suspicions' (*BB*, 92). Such facts aimed to widen the gap between party officials and citizens, emphasising their unequal contribution to the war effort. But the PWE also encouraged leaflet writers to '[w]rite on a

[41] The implausible events concern Lina Pancev's student exchange in Paris (unlikely because of the Iron Curtain), her accommodated life in Communist Bulgaria (unlikely because her family supported the royalty) and her intense anti-Semitism (unlikely because Bulgarian society was not anti-Semite and in fact helped to save Jews from deportation). These might reflect the difficulty of finding information on Bulgaria, which was one of the least known countries in the Eastern bloc. See Kapka Kassabova, 'Introduction', in *Territorial Rights* by Muriel Spark (Edinburgh: Polygon, 2018), pp. xiv-xv.

basis of truth, and do not merely state, but support by evidence, or what looks like evidence'.[42] Delmer put this theory into practice by sending food packages to the families of German POWs who had been portrayed as earning high salaries in the US and Canada in order to 'prove' their newly-acquired wealth: 'Enemy propaganda? Nonsense, look at the splendid parcel young Schöller had just sent his parents!' (*BB*, 141). Operation Periwig, designed to put great pressure on the resources and staff of the *Sicherheitsdienst* (SD) and Gestapo, offers an additional example of the use of fake evidence. Following the suggestion that carrier pigeons with questionnaires could be dropped over Germany in order to get resistance-minded Germans to return useful intelligence, Delmer proposed that 'in addition to parachuting live birds with questionnaires in their boxes we should also drop a few dead ones without boxes but with questionnaires attached to their legs which have already been completed—by . . . er . . . ourselves!' (*BB*, 211-12). When the plan was adopted, Delmer expected that the fake questionnaires, carefully phrased by PWE agents, would lead the Gestapo to arrest some of their own Party officials and encourage the ordinary civilian to defect following the example of the party comrade whose inauthentic filled-in questionnaires they had picked up (*BB*, 212).

2.2 Amount and Tone of Information

Disseminating the right amount of information – not too little, not too much – was also crucial for psychological warfare since excessive knowledge could give away the deception. Black propagandists were encouraged to select only the key details which would make a narrative credible, and whenever possible, to '[d]eal with concrete illustration (in the sense of example) rather than with abstract argument'.[43] Intellectual appeals, which could be easily misunderstood or even identified as propaganda, were to be avoided in favour of concise and transparent information. In Spark's autobiographical novel *Loitering with Intent*, novelist Fleur shows her artistic ability to plausibly transform lifeless data into a colourful narrative. When discussing her first novel, *Warrender Chase*, she claims that 'she managed to make [Warrender's war record in Burma] really credible even although [she] filled in the war bit with a few strokes, knowing in fact, so little about the war in Burma' (*LI*, 60). In *The Comforters*, following Caroline Rose's accusation of the 'Typing Ghost', the disembodied being who seems capable of recording her every thought and movement, for 'not record[ing] any lively details about this hospital ward [because it] doesn't know how to describe a hospital ward', we receive a schematic yet plausible description of the main items we would expect to find in an orthopaedic ward, including 'plaster casts', 'the cages humping over the beds', 'the trolley at the window end' and 'a huge pair of plaster-cutting scissors like gardening shears', not to mention the physiotherapists themselves (*C*, 172-3). Spark's own economic writing style, not dissimilar from that of the writers who appear in

[42] FO 898/99, Lectures. 1943. Allied Propaganda in World War II: The Complete Record of the Political Warfare Executive (FO 898). TNA, UK. *Archives Unbound.* Web. 26 Feb. 2019.
[43] FO 898/99, Lectures. 1943.

her fiction, might well have been influenced by her PWE work in which clarity and brevity were key to success.

Unlike the BBC, which focused primarily on news items, PWE broadcasts recognised the importance of a colourful story with a strong emotional component: ‘We reported detailed and telling facts and took immense trouble to present our news wherever possible with the human and personal angles beloved of such popular newspapers as the *Daily Express*’ (*BB*, 160). PWE propagandists also appealed to German nationalism, both to disguise their British origin and to gain the trust of the German population. In fact, Delmer followed Hitler’s advice that propaganda 'must be aimed at the emotions and only to a very limited degree at the so-called intellect’.[44] And so does Sister Alexandra, one of Spark’s foremost mythologizers, in *The Abbess of Crewe*. Sister Alexandra, who seeks to persuade the nuns to elect her as Abbess by appealing to their higher instincts, is instead advised by the missionary Sister Gertrude to ‘“[a]ppeal to their lower instincts […] within the walls of the convent. It’s only when exhorting the strangers outside that one appeals to the higher’ (*AC*, 55). Despite pretending to appeal to the nuns’ intellect, her emotional speech in fact addresses their snobbery, which is satirised through their dehumanising covert meals: ‘Anxious to be ladies, even the sewing nuns keep their embarrassed eyes fixed on the ground as they tread forward to their supper of rice and meatballs, these being made up out of a tinned food for dogs…’ (*AC*, 60-1). In addition to their sentimental approach, PWE broadcasts also featured exciting dance music which entertained and distracted the Germans from the dreary wartime news bulletins whilst acting as a call sign for listeners to tune in (*BB*, 84). Sister Alexandra similarly uses aesthetics for mass persuasion, for example, when interrupting her speech ‘to smile like an angel of some unearthly intelligent substance upon the community’ (*AC*, 60). Furthermore, Sister Alexandra’s intertextual use of poetry in her speech, which aims to position her as a charismatic leader, may be intended to evoke Benjamin’s aforementioned notion of the ‘aestheticization of politics’ whose dangerous idealism has been implicated in the rise of totalitarian movements.

2.3 Narrative Coherence

Black radio stations required less narrative coherence among their stories than those featuring white propaganda because they pretended to be German and were not connected with each other; however, close collaboration was necessary to ensure they did not contradict each other’s stories or those of the BBC.[45] In fact, a ‘two-way co-ordination’ was sustained between black broadcasts and black publications, with the latter often acting as reinforcement to the former by reproducing its content (*BG*, 206). As a result, black propaganda cultivated a degree of internal coherence which further increased its credibility. Fiction similarly requires internal coherence, which is usually achieved through causality,

[44] Adolf Hitler, *Mein Kampf* [*My Struggle*] (Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1943), p. 180.
[45] Cruikshank, p. 71.

as well as adherence to genre conventions and character types. In *The Comforters*, Caroline Rose hears voices and the sound of a typewriter, which leads her to believe that she is a character in a novel. She regards the 'Typing Ghost' as the articulation of predetermination, and rebels against it in order to take control of the narrative: 'The narrative says we went by car; all right, we must go by train. […] It's a matter of asserting free will' (*C*, 101). In her refusal to be subjected to this 'phoney plot', Caroline ridicules the novel's bizarre mixture of literary genres – featuring elements of the supernatural and detective stories – and the failure of Laurence's grandmother, Louisa Jepp, and Mrs. Hogg to adhere to their character types, thereby questioning the plausibility of the narrative created by the disembodied author: "Your grandmother being a gangster, it's taking things too far. She's an implausible character, don't you see? […] So is Mrs Hogg. Is it likely that the pious old cow is a blackmailer?"' (*C*, 108). Caroline's scepticism towards the narrative stems from the fact that 'the form of the work is so manifestly artificial that the illusion of reality cannot be sufficiently achieved'.[46] Her role of 'critic' constitutes a metafictional technique which further contributes to laying bare the precarious nature of the novel's fictional construction.

A plausible story, however, must go beyond stereotypes in order to be believed. As Taylor Stoehr notes, 'the most plausible story need not seem very lifelike; that which is trivial or mundane will hardly be trusted as faithful to experience, for reality cannot be so drab as all that'.[47] This creative principle is fully embraced by Fleur in *Loitering with Intent* when describing the creation of a character:

> …to make a character ring true it needs must be in some way contradictory, somewhere a paradox. […] where the self-portraits of Sir Quentin's ten testifiers were going all wrong, where they sounded stiff and false, occurred at points where they strained themselves into a constancy and steadiness that they evidently wished to possess but didn't. And I had thrown in my own bits of invented patchwork to cheer thing up rather than make each character coherent in itself. (*LI*, 27).

Fleur is an experimental writer who incorporates elements of the 1950s' French *nouveau roman* into her work. For instance, she feels 'compelled to go on with [her] story without indicating what the reader should think', and 'wasn't writing poetry and prose so that the reader would think her a nice person', views which render her evil in the eyes of her unimaginative friend Dottie and her boss Sir Quentin, who, unlike her, champion the benefits of complete frankness (*LI*, 52, 58). Most importantly, her concept of plausibility aligns closely with that of the French writer and theorist Alain Robbe-Grillet, who claimed that '[t]he little detail which "makes you think it's true" is no longer of any interest to the novelist […] [t]he thing that strikes him […] is more likely, on the contrary, to be the little detail that

[46] Andrew Gaedtke, *Modernism and the Machinery of Madness: Psychosis, Technology and Narrative Worlds* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), p. 97.
[47] Taylor Stoehr, 'Realism and Verisimilitude', *Texas Studies in Literature and Language*, 11 (1969), 1269-88 (p. 1280).

strikes a *false* note (my emphasis)'.[48] Delmer's interest in the *false note* is evident in his strategies for distorting information, which routinely involved the incorporation of 'real' Nazi news items received via a Hell-Schreiber teleprinter into his black broadcasts:

> Some items we used as cover to give ourselves authenticity as a German station purveying official news. To others we gave a subversive twist so that when listeners heard them on the German radio later, they quite unconsciously read our tendentious distortion as the truth "hidden between the lines" (*BB*, 90).

However, whereas Fleur's creation of 'contradictory' characters results from the casual insertion of 'invented patchwork' that appears truthful into false narratives, Delmer's *false note* stems from his deliberate insertion of lies into truthful news. Therefore, Fleur's fiction insinuates an ethical drive that is virtually absent from Delmer's propaganda (see Chapter 2).

2.4 Targeting and Covert Motives

PWE propagandists were aware that nations cannot be homogenously addressed, so they carefully targeted their stories at the right publics. They believed that propaganda 'must have an individual or sectional appeal, since the audience consists of individuals and since it is only by sectional segregation – by aiming at the joints in the structure of the enemy – that the enemy can be broken up and disrupted'.[49] This is precisely the approach taken by the mysterious telephone caller in *Memento Mori*, who exhorts the elderly to remember death. According to Bryan Cheyette, only those characters who are able to 'unify matter and spirit, or the natural and the supernatural' can understand the phone calls as a benign reminder of death instead of a threat.[50] This translates into the various voices adopted by the telephone caller, who perhaps as a result of the characters' confirmation bias, is perceived by novelist Charmian Colston as 'a very civil young man' and by Henry Mortimer as '[a] woman, gentle-spoken and respectful', whereas Dame Lettie, who endlessly amends her will and threatens her relatives with disinheritance, feels personally threatened by the 'sinister' voice (*MM*, 145-51). In *The Abbess of Crewe*, Abbess Alexandra is similarly aware of the differing needs of her audience and wittily modifies her rhetoric to fit the circumstances. For example, she lectures the passive nuns on rules of behaviour and unintelligible electronic surveillance, uses the power of argument on the Vatican – a real menace to the convent – and deliberately confuses the predatory media with 'some sort of a garble' (*AC*, 70). Understanding the fears and desires of others in order to anticipate their behaviour is therefore foregrounded as an essential ability for propagandists and novelists alike.

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[48] Alain Robbe-Grillet, *Snapshots and Towards a New Novel* (London: Calder and Boyars, 1965), p. 157.
[49] FO 898/99, Lectures. 1943.
[50] Cheyette, p. 41.

The PWE aimed to influence the thinking of a receiver 'without his conscious collaboration' to achieve 'an ulterior motive' which had to remain shielded from its German audience.[51] Likewise, Spark's narrators, despite their keen eye for circumstantial detail, are often reluctant to disclose character motivations. Following Robbe-Grillet in his rejection of omniscience, Spark tends to depict characters through their actions, avoiding explanation of how their past states of mind have led to their present predicaments. Her focus, therefore, is not on causes but on effects apprehended through perception. This disavowal of motive may partly be the result of her Catholic sense of mystery; the recognition that only God can know our thoughts and humans should simply come to terms with our ignorance. Yet her playful obscurity forces the reader to problem-solve – much like Germans would have done when hearing black propaganda – in order to piece together the meaning of the text. As ex-propagandist Elsa in *The Hothouse by the East River* notes in relation to her psychoanalyst, who is trying to understand her mental condition: '"He hasn't got his material yet. He's looking for a cause, and all I'm giving him are effects. It's lovely"' (*HER*, 44). Similarly, when discussing the protagonist of her novel *Warrender Chase* in *Loitering with Intent*, Fleur uses metafiction to expose the possibility of Warrender's cognition, mirroring the interest in covert motives she shares with her literary creator:

> All these years since, the critics have been asking whether Warrender was in love with his nephew. How do I know? Warrender Chase never existed, he is only some hundreds of words, some punctuation, sentences, paragraphs, marks on the page. […] I didn't go in for motives, I never have (*LI*, 61).

In *The Driver's Seat*, Lise engineers her own murder in order to become an absence. Despite carefully describing all her movements, the narrator is unable to access Lise's consciousness, prompting readers to follow clues in an attempt to understand her reasoning. In her hotel room, Lise is presented as a hesitant woman, who unfolds and folds her clothes as if 'contemplating an immediate departure from the hotel' (*DS*, 37). Yet her mental state is perpetually censored, never revealed; in the narrator's words: 'Who knows her thoughts? Who can tell?' (*DS*, 39). In fact, not even other characters do, as Lise compulsively lies to those she encounters, depicting herself as someone who is 'not looking to pick up strangers', 'a tourist, a teacher from Iowa, New Jersey' or 'a widow […] and intellectual' (*DS*, 27, 62, 63). Spark's use of covert motives helps to maintain secrecy and intrigue in her novels, but also prompts readers to critically assess her texts in order to construct meaning from the characters' actions, often with little or no authorial guidance.

2.5 Chronological Disruption: Prolepsis and Analepsis

In addition to covert motives, Spark's disruption of normal chronology by flashbacks and flash-forwards contributes to the disorienting nature of her writing. Mirroring black propaganda storytelling, which looks into the future – the (hopeful) movement of the enemy to act against its interests – and

[51] FO 898/99, Lectures. 1943.

from there to the past – the assessment of intelligence on the effectiveness of propaganda campaigns (also known as 'comebacks') – in order to establish the success of a campaign, Spark's novels often plunge us back and forth for satirical or allegorical effect while focusing on what Frank Kermode has named 'the middest' of the narrative. In *The Sense of an Ending*, Kermode argues that fictions, with their beginnings and ends, help us to make sense of our *in media res* lives. Analysing apocalyptic narratives in particular, he explains that throughout history, they have always been subject to a disconfirmation transforming the end from imminent to immanent and thus allowing flexibility for the narrative to plausibly reach its end:

> Men in the middest make considerable imaginative investments in coherent patterns which, by the provision of an end, make possible a satisfying consonance with the origins and with the middle. That is why the image of the end can never be *permanently* falsified.[52]

In view of this, Spark's tendency to disclose endings imposes a necessity while allowing room for *peripateia* – 'disconfirmation followed by a consonance' – which eventually meets the foretold end.[53] At the beginning everything is possible, at the middest certain actions are plausible and, at the end, everything becomes necessary. Spark frequently uses narratological prolepsis, which entails a teleological retrospect allowing the future event to be given a significance it does not possess at the time of its occurrence.[54]

This is the case at the beginning of Chapter 3 of *The Driver's Seat*, which travels from the present into the future to foretell Lise's murder before returning to her present journey:

> She will be found tomorrow morning dead from multiple stab-wounds, her wrists bound with a silk scarf and her ankles bound with a man's necktie, in the grounds of an empty villa, in a park of the foreign city to which she is travelling on the flight now boarding at Gate 14 (*DS*, 18).

But the opening sequence of the book, in which Lise fiercely refuses to purchase a non-staining dress, has already provided a powerful proleptic hint, which only becomes significant in the context of her murderer's conviction. A predetermined ending thus alters our understanding of the present, which must consist of a series of plausible events leading to the already-anticipated conclusion. Knowing her end but not its details, Lise suffers from the anxiety of non-conformity; she 'fears that her life will not comply with the story, that she will make mistakes; she does not fear or question the violent death toward which the story goes'.[55] Indeed, Lise's restless search for her man – ultimately murderer rather

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[52] Frank Kermode, *The Sense of an Ending: Studies in the Theory of Fiction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1967), p. 17.
[53] Kermode, *Sense of an Ending*, p. 18.
[54] Mark Currie, *About Time: Narrative, Fiction and the Philosophy of Time* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2010), p. 33.
[55] Judith Roof, 'The Future Perfect's Perfect Future: Spark's and Duras's Narrative Drive', in *Theorizing Muriel Spark: Gender, Race, Deconstruction*, ed. by Martin McQuillan (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002), pp. 49-66 (p. 60).

than boyfriend – is both carefully premeditated and spontaneous, evidencing her ultimate lack of control over the narrative. She confides to Mrs Fiedke, an elderly lady who is waiting for her nephew (Lise's eventual murderer), that she 'keep[s] making mistakes [and] starts to cry, very slightly sniffing, weeping…' (*DS*, 58). Her death, accompanied by her rape, further questions to what extent Lise is in the driver's seat after all.

In contrast, the butler Lister in *Not to Disturb* is exceedingly confident not only of the end of the tale – the murder of the aristocratic Klopstocks and their secretary – but also of the *necessity* of every action leading to this conclusion. From the very beginning, he states that '[the servants] are not discussing possibilities [but] facts' (*ND*, 1). The aristocratic Klopstocks and their secretary, who are 'not to be disturbed', are expected to die during the night and their servants, in anticipation of the tragedy, have prepared to lucratively sell the story to the media, with the serialization contract already in hand and a film script written. When their seemingly smooth plan is disrupted by the knowledge that the madman in the attic is the Baron's brother – instead of the Baroness' brother – and that he happens to be second in line, Lister rewrites the plot to accommodate this disconfirmation, which 'was quite unforeseen, but one foresees the unforeseen' (*ND*, 62). Unlike Lise, Lister leaves little room for the anxiety of non-conformity and confidently prophesises that his masters 'have placed themselves, unfortunately, within the realm of predestination' (*ND*, 33). By staging and recording the marriage of the pregnant servant Eleanor with the Baron's brother, the servants ensure they remain in control of their masters' inheritance. In fact, Lister's hints about his masters' deaths are realised as the past through the use of recording technology, which 'installs in the present an anticipated future from which the present will be re-experienced as representation of the past, or an infinitive sequence of future presents from which the moment can be recollected'.[56] While expecting the arrival of the cameramen, the servants have already started to collect their memories of an event which has not yet happened. Lister's use of performative prolepsis, which 'produces the future in the act of envisaging it, so that the possible transforms itself into the actual' mirrors the future-oriented practices of PWE agents.[57]

Soldatensender Calais – a successful 'grey' military radio station which mixed 'absolutely unexceptionable information' with 'a number of isolated, more or less tendentious items' – was the medium for one of such practices, framed within Delmer's 'softening up' of the Germans as part of Operation Overlord (*BB*, 113). It consisted of exploiting the feelings of those German officers' corps leaders who were becoming disenchanted with Hitler's thirst for war and longed for the establishment of peace with the West: 'we had been seeking to suggest to them that all they had to do was to overthrow Hitler for us to be ready to start peace negotiations' (*BB*, 120). In doing so, *Soldatensender Calais* inspired them to believe in the possibility of both casting aside the Führer and achieving peace with the

[56] Currie, p. 41.
[57] Currie, p. 44.

West, even though PWE propagandists were aware that the latter was unthinkable. To Delmer's surprise, this offer was taken up by the officers in what became known as the 'Peace Putsch', an unsuccessful revolt against Hitler which cost them their lives (*BB*, 121). Otto John – the only survivor – later joined Delmer's team as a POW and reported 'that [its] broadcasts had indeed been heard by the conspirators, and interpreted in precisely the sense [Delmer] had hoped' (*BB*, 121).

The PWE demanded unconditional secrecy and members of staff were often unaware of the work carried out by their colleagues. For example, Spark's adherence to the 'Careless Talk Costs Lives' campaign during her interview with Delmer certainly helped her to secure her PWE job (see Introduction). As historian Jo Fox notes, the 'Careless Talk Costs Lives' campaign is unique in its compliance with PWE objectives rather than those of the 'People's War', encouraging a culture of 'distrust, suspicion, and fear, where such aspects of "ordinary" life as conversational gossip were presented as dangerous'.[58] Spark goes on to fictionalise the legacies of such secrecy in *The Hothouse by the East River*, the novel which most closely and literally depicts Spark's work for the PWE. Its central character Elsa, like Spark, works for the organisation, writing down military intelligence and taking POWs for walks in her free time. Unlike *The Driver's Seat* and *Not to Disturb*, Spark here uses frequent analepsis – the insertion of past-oriented narratives into the present – in order to explore the illusory nature of memory and the self-deceit of those who attempt to impose misremembered events as realities. For Elsa's husband Paul, also a propagandist during the war, life in 1944 England 'was more vivid than it is now. Everything was more distinct. The hours of the day lasted longer. One lived excitedly and dangerously' (*HER*, 25). In contrast, their post-war existence in New York appears neurotic, grotesque and even hallucinatory rather than substantially real. For instance, Elsa is followed by an uncanny shadow which falls in the wrong direction and acts as an 'externalization' of her repressed past.

As a propagandist for the PWE, Elsa was not only expected to keep her work secret, but also 'deprived of any insights into its doing' (*HER*, 49). This professional secrecy feeds into her personal life with her reluctance to reveal to Paul whether she ever slept with Kiel – a German POW who had been presumed dead but has mysteriously appeared in New York. Furthermore, her seeming inability to distinguish fiction from reality after her secret work has ended calls into question her mental sanity:

> She tells him everything that comes into her head at this hour of the evening and it is for him to discover whether what she says is true or whether she has imagined it. But has she decided on this course, or can't she help it? How false, how true? (*HER*, 3)

The performance of *Peter Pan* by an elderly cast becomes a symbol of Paul and Elsa's refusal to face the reality of their past death and the fictional nature of their current predicament. Paul's inability to cope with his jealousy has brought Elsa back to life as 'a development of an idea [which] took a life of

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[58] Jo Fox, 'Careless Talk: Tensions within British Domestic Propaganda during the Second World War', *The Journal of British Studies*, 51 (2012), 936-66 (p. 937).

her own. She's grotesque. When she died she was a sweet English girl…' (*HER*, 104). It is only when confronting the fact that they never survived the war – instead dying in a bombed train – that Paul and Elsa are able to abandon their self-deceptive existences and come to terms with reality: 'They stand outside their apartment block, looking at the scaffolding. […] A demolition truck waits for the new day's shift to begin. […] [The billboard] announces the new block of apartments to be built on the site of the old' (*HER*, 136).

Both prolepsis and analepsis can be translated into psychological states of mind referred to as anticipation-neurosis and memory-neurosis, respectively, both of which are enacted in the present. A PWE lecture on anticipation-neurosis defines this phenomenon as 'a disturbance of the mental and emotional equilibrium of a person owing to fear of unpleasant events to come', in contrast to memory-neurosis which results from 'the impact of certain negative reminiscences which are either conscious or operate in a repressed manner…' [59] Anticipation-neurosis was considered to be the result of German domestic propaganda banking on fear of British dominance of Germany and the guilt (and fear of revenge) resulting from the crimes committed in Eastern Europe.[60] Lest an intensification of anticipation-neurosis would prolong warfare, PWE propagandists advocated for 'a mixture of tact and firmness' when dealing with this issue, which afflicted Germans in particular due to their 'living more in the future and for the future than in and for the present'.[61] The PWE's preoccupation with anticipation-neurosis and memory-neurosis originated from a desire to manipulate the present perceptions of future and past events in order to use them as weapons of persuasion. Spark is aware of how such methods may be exploited to concoct plausible realities and her fiction often explores their troubling effects on characters. In *Memento Mori*, the materialistic elderly who are unable to come to terms with the supernatural phone calls live in a permanent state of anticipation-neurosis while awaiting their foretold end. In particular, Dame Lettie is convinced that the caller 'must be someone who is in [her] Will' and incessantly wonders who this threatening enemy may be (*MM*, 99). Her restlessness contrasts with the peaceful response of Henry Mortimer, who escapes anticipation-neurosis by recognising death as a necessity which must be incorporated into life: 'Death, when it approaches, ought not to take one by surprise. It should be part of the full expectancy of life. Without an ever-present sense of death life is insipid' (*MM*, 148).

While *Memento Mori* looks into the future, *A Far Cry from Kensington* is haunted by wartime traumas. Polish refugee and dressmaker Wanda Podolak, 'whose capacity for suffering verged on rapacity', unwittingly brings her wartime unhappiness into her London existence (*FCK*, 3). On hearing 'a long, loud high-pitched cry which diminished into a sustained, distant and still audible ululation', her landlady Milly and fellow tenant Mrs. Hawkins discover that Wanda has received a threatening

[59] FO 898/99, Lectures. 1943.
[60] FO 898/99, Lectures. 1943.
[61] FO 898/99, Lectures. 1943.

message: ‘We, the Organisers, have our eyes on you’ (*FCK*, 22-3). This is just the beginning of Wanda’s recurring intimidation aided by anonymous letters and fake press cuttings, which brings about her physical and mental deterioration culminating in her suicide. As Mrs. Hawkins had prophesised, ‘her brave future was gone forever’ (*FCK*, 25). Cathy, a bookkeeper who works alongside Mrs. Hawkins at Ullswater and York publishers, similarly carries the scars of wartime trauma. She ‘had been in a German concentration camp in the thirties’ and her voice has been reduced to ‘a crackle of broken English’ (*FCK*, 10). Despite being in full employment and leading a seemingly tranquil life, her traumatic past is enacted in the shape of suicidal thoughts: ‘“I should put my head in the gas oven”’ (*FCK*, 59). Both Wanda and Cathy are subject to memory-neurosis in their incapacity to move beyond their painful pasts, with their disturbing voices reflecting ‘that mode of absence from oneself that is the condition of the survivor, the savagely traumatised, and abjected’.[62]

2.6 Repetition

In his 1925 autobiography *Mein Kampf*, Hitler, a key advocate of propaganda as a medium through which power could be exercised, had already highlighted the benefits of repetition for successful mass persuasion:

> [Propaganda] must confine itself to a few points and repeat them over and over. […] [T]he masses are slow-moving, and they always require a certain time before they are ready even to notice a thing, and only after the simplest ideas are repeated thousands of times will the masses finally remember them. When there is a change, it must not alter the content of what the propaganda is driving at, but in the end must always say the same thing.[63]

Repetition was closely observed by the PWE, whose lectures instructed would-be propagandists to

> play countless variations on the main theme. This repetition, if <u>obvious</u> carries with it the danger that his public may be bored, and lose interest in his arguments – But if he persists and secures a sufficient number of new <u>"slants"</u> to his appeal, he is bound to impress some sections of the public.[64]

Delmer adopted this technique from his early radio station *Herr Gustav Siegfried* (*Der Chef*), which purported to broadcast the views of a Prussian general – ‘loyal and devoted to the Führer, but scathingly contemptuous of the “rabble” that had seized control of the Fatherland in the Führer’s name’ – in order to create division between the Army and the Nazi Party (*BB*, 42). *Der Chef* would ‘invent a good story and continue to repeat it, although with variations until yet another and another and another replaced it’ in order to encourage a correlation between repetition and truthfulness (*BG*, 131). This practice, which remains central to both consumer advertising and political propaganda, was first theorised in psychological terms by Lynn Hasher et al. in 1977 as the illusory truth effect. Through an experiment

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62 Patricia Waugh, ‘Muriel Spark’s “Informed Air”’, p. 1640.
63 Hitler, pp. 184-5.
64 FO 898/99, Lectures. 1943.

in which forty college students were asked to rate the validity of sixty plausible statements – twenty of which were repeated – on a seven-point scale, they demonstrated that 'the repetition of a plausible statement increases a person's belief in the referential validity or truth of that statement'.[65] Although the illusory truth effect has two main constraints (source recollection and pre-experimental knowledge), the reliability of a source of information is not always retrievable, especially if there is a wide time span between the learning event and the moment of retrieval, and pre-experimental knowledge has been shown not to prevent the illusory truth effect. In fact, two related experiments by Lisa K. Fazio et al. have demonstrated that 'repetition increased perceived truthfulness, even for contradictions of well-known facts'.[66] In contrast to the knowledge-conditional model, which assumes that participants only rely on fluency when knowledge is not successfully retrieved, these experiments suggest that a fluency-conditional model, which shows that participants only access knowledge when fluency is absent or unreliable, may be more accurate.[67] The reason is that repetition increases the processing fluency of a statement, which can lead people to neglect their knowledge in favour of cognitive ease. In fact, people show a tendency to believe in the truth of a statement because disbelief would entail additional time and energy.[68] Through the use of repetition, the PWE aimed to produce the illusory truth effect in the minds of Germans so that they would believe its frequently reproduced disinformation.

Spark's fiction similarly uses the illusory truth effect to show how characters deceive themselves and each other by surrendering their own knowledge and refusing to critically examine the fabricated stories imposed upon them. In *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie*, Miss Brodie endlessly proclaims to her girls that her 'prime has truly begun', yet she provides no evidence to support this claim (*PMJB*, 8). By the time the girls arrive in her class, Miss Brodie is a spinster in her forties, one in the 'legions of her kind during the nineteen-thirties […] who crowded their war-bereaved spinsterhood with voyages of discovery into new ideas and energetic practices in art or social welfare, education or religion' (*PMJB*, 39). Despite her charismatic personality, she remains an isolated teacher who 'never discussed her affairs with the other members of the staff', instead sharing her personal life with her pupils – 'the crème de la crème' – who she invites for supper or takes to the ballet (*PMJB*, 5). Therefore, her self-inflicted prime, which 'extended […] still in the making when the girls were well on in their teens' is not historically rooted but mythical, an alternative history that seeks to obliterate the lack of opportunities for women engendered by the First World War and the Great Depression (*PMJB*, 41). Through repetition, Miss Brodie comes to believe that she is in her prime and inflicts this delusion on

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65 Lynn Hasher, David Goldstein and Thomas Toppino, 'Frequency and the Conference of Referential Validity', *Journal of Verbal Learning and Verbal Behavior*, 16 (1977), 107-12 (p. 111).
66 Lisa K. Fazio, Nadia M. Brashier, B. Keith Payne and Elizabeth J. Marsh, 'Knowledge Does Not Protect Against Illusory Truth', *Journal of Experimental Psychology: General*, 144 (2015), 993-1002, (p. 996).
67 Fazio et al., p. 997.
68 Daniel T. Gilbert, 'How Mental Systems Believe', *American Psychologist*, 46 (1991), 107-19 (p. 116).

her girls, who fail to question the validity of this knowledge. While this example of deception may seem relatively innocent, Miss Brodie's attempts to fictionalise reality are not always so. In fact, her student Sandy Stranger soon realises that Miss Brodie's embrace of fascism and vicarious existence through her girls 'was not all theory […] in the way that so much of life was unreal talk and game-planning' and that 'Miss Brodie meant it' (*PMJB*, 119-20). Through the critical figure of Sandy, Spark exposes Miss Brodie's adoption of the illusory truth effect as a strategy which allows her to model the world according to her unrestrained imagination.

If *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie* succeeds in creating Miss Brodie's 'prime' as a fraudulent characterisation detail, *The Public Image* goes even further in its representation of a character whose own sense of selfhood relies on the illusory truth effect. Shallow actress Annabel Christopher is turned into a movie star as a result of her consistent playing of the Lady-Tiger role: 'she was a tiger woman at heart and in "the secret part of their lives". This tiger was portrayed only by her eyes; it was an essential of the public image that the tiger quality was always restrained in public' (*PI*, 22). Her public performance of the Lady-Tiger ends up leaking into her private life to the extent that her image becomes her very essence. Annabel is therefore constructed as a Pygmalion-like figure, who in the hands of film director Luigi Leopardi and his publicity assistant, has been reduced to her deceptive physical appearance: 'Before I made you the Tiger-Lady, you didn't even look like a lady in public, never mind a tiger in private. It's what I began to make of you that you've partly become' (*PI*, 29). Through her performative enactment of the Lady-Tiger role, and most importantly, through its media dissemination, Annabel has been replaced by her own image. If Miss Brodie was able to shape the reality of her group of pupils according to her wishes, the film industry offers Annabel the possibility of projecting a mass alternative reality. She has become, in Jean Baudrillard's term, a simulacrum, a model of 'a real without origin or reality'.[69] However, her baby constitutes the last remnant of her personal life – irreconcilable with the Lady-Tiger image – which anchors her to reality: 'She felt a curious fear of display where the baby was concerned, as if this deep and complete satisfaction might be disfigured or melted away by some public image' (*PI*, 30). On fleeing from the spotlights, Annabel transforms from object of spectacle to critical agent, thus becoming able to create a new life for herself and her baby. Through her satirical look at the film business, Spark employs the illusory truth effect to provide a critique of consistent imagery as substitute for reality. Spark's fascination with impostorship may partly stem from her PWE experience, as it was a method used for military deception, as evidenced by Operation Copperhead (see Chapter 4).

If *The Public Image* allows a narrow escape from artefactual reality, this is not the case in *Aiding and Abetting*, where Dr. Hildegard Wolf is being threatened with the revelation of her past as

[69] Jean Baudrillard, *Simulations*, trans. by Paul Foss, Paul Patton and Philip Beitchman (New York: Semiotext(e), 1983), p. 2.

stigmatic Beate Pappenheim by Lord Lucan's double, Walker. As a result of the repetitive enactment of the blood-stained wounds and the numerous testimonies supporting her healing powers, Heinrich – Hildegard's boyfriend and accomplice – falls prey to the illusory truth effect. In fact, he 'appeared so much to believe in Beate's claims that possibly, on interrogation, it would have emerged that he truly believed them' (*AA*, 17). Similarly, Beate's Catholic devotees, having consistently invested sums of money into her cause, find it easier to perpetuate the scientifically exposed fraud than to question the veracity of her tale: '"Beate, you have got to be true. I believe in you because I sent you all my savings and I prayed your Novena" were the words of one typical letter…' (*AA*, 19). Consistent fakery thus creates the illusory truth effect which leads people to disregard fact in favour of fiction. Yet the spell goes beyond deceiving others, and compulsive liars often remain in danger of believing their own lies. Beate, in fact, was convinced that she 'did apparently effect a number of cures, perhaps by the power of suggestion, it's true. But people were cured by me in my stigmatic days. I felt the part' (*AA*, 107).

Self-deception was also common in black propaganda. As Delmer remarks, 'comebacks' often illustrate 'the danger of misleading your own side'; for example, a report from the American Services Attachés claimed that the Army, alienated from the Nazi Party, had set up a radio station called *Der Chef*, when in reality, such a radio station was run by the PWE (*BB*, 74-5). In her autobiography, Spark also recalls reading 'with great enjoyment in the British newspaper […] a straight news item [that she] had seen and heard […] invented by Sefton Delmer…' (*CV*, 150). In *Aiding and Abetting*, Spark illustrates this danger by presenting Beate's self-deception as an unavoidable risk when reality is persistently being replaced by carefully crafted plausible narratives. In fact, Beate seems to embrace the paranoid style of conspiracy theorists to the extent that she 'produces heroic strivings for "evidence" to prove that the unbelievable is the only thing that can be believed'.[70] Such a paranoid style was also at play in Nazi Germany, where 'the exaggerated fear that one is about to be destroyed by the enemy' – in this case, Jewish people – served to legitimate '"final solutions" to perceived risks'.[71] It is likely that German people would continue to believe in this myth of a Jewish conspiracy because disbelief would necessitate a complete reconfiguration of their worldview.

3. From Plausible Narrative to Myth: The Origins of Post-War Mythmaking

The second volume of Delmer's autobiography, *Black Boomerang*, begins in a Frankfurt cinema in 1960. Delmer is watching a wartime thriller which shows the German army arduously fighting both the Allies and the Nazi party, implying that most Germans were really against Hitler. This myth of 'the good upright patriotic Germans of the Wehrmacht being the bitter enemies of the Nazi Party and the

[70] Richard Hofstadter, 'The Paranoid Style in American Politics', in *The Paranoid Style in American Politics and Other Essays* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1966), pp. 3-40 (p. 36).
[71] A. Dirk Moses, 'Paranoia and Partisanship: Genocide Studies, Holocaust Historiography, and the "Apocalyptic Conjecture"', *The Historical Journal*, 54 (2011), 553-83 (p. 575).

Gestapo', which had actually been concocted by the PWE during the Second World War, continued to haunt post-war Germany (*BB*, 11). Originally designed to destroy Hitler, the myth had, ironically enough, been transmuted into a vindication of German righteousness, showing the perilous 'boomerang' effect that could result from plausible narratives becoming solidified into myths which are accepted as absolute truths.

According to Roland Barthes, myths can be defined as ahistorical narratives seeking fixed and sometimes totalitarian understandings of the world that prevent the imagination from envisioning alternative possibilities.[72] In his seminal study *Mythologies* (1957), Barthes explains that myths emerge when history is turned into nature: 'myth has the task of giving an historical intention a natural justification, and making contingency appear eternal'.[73] Since myths de-historicize and de-politicize what is always historical and political, Barthes condemns them as weapons of the bourgeoisie used to justify its own ideological preferences and eliminate dissenting views.[74] While Barthes regards myths as the products of historical forces (even if they painstakingly attempt to conceal this fact), Frank Kermode contrasts the flexibility of fiction with the immanence of myth. Influenced by Hans Vaihinger's philosophy of 'as if', which proposes that human beings need fictions in order to make sense of the unmanageable complexity of the world, Kermode argues that fictions are valuable because they provide those comforting beginnings, middles and ends that we are denied in our *in media res* existences.[75] Yet he warns us that fictions too have the potential to disguise themselves as natural and therefore the capacity to transform themselves into myths:

> Fictions can degenerate into myths whenever they are not consciously held to be fictive. […] Myth operates within the diagrams of ritual, which presupposes total and adequate explanations of things as they are and were; it is a sequence of radically unchangeable gestures. Fictions are for finding things out, and they change as the needs of sense-making change. Myths are the agents of stability, fictions the agents of change. Myths call for absolute, fictions for conditional assent.[76]

From a cognitive perspective, a myth can be regarded as a metarepresentation – 'a representation of a representation [consisting of] a source of representation [and] the content of representation' – which has lost its source.[77] Lisa Zunshine, for example, has traced a literary tradition of 'Quixotic'

[72] Roland Barthes, *Mythologies*, trans. by A. Lavers (New York: The Noonday Press, 1991), p. 141, p. 156.
[73] Barthes, *Mythologies*, p. 142.
[74] Barthes, *Mythologies*, p. 156.
[75] Kermode, *Sense of an Ending*, p. 7. See Hans Vaihinger, *The Philosophy of 'As if': A System of the Theoretical, Practical and Religious Fictions of Mankind* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1935).
[76] Kermode, *Sense of an Ending*, p. 39.
[77] Lisa Zunshine, *Why We Read Fiction: Theory of Mind and the Novel* (Columbus, OH: Ohio State University Press, 2006), p. 47. For example, in the statement 'I think Muriel Spark is a great writer', 'I think' would act as the source and 'that Muriel Spark is a great writer' would act as the content. For a stimulating discussion of metarepresentations by Quixotic characters (i.e., mythmakers), see pp. 75-118.

protagonists, including Katerina Ivanovna in Dostoyevski's *Crime and Punishment* and Charles Kinbote in Nabokov's *Pale Fire*, who 'wax delusional by failing to keep track of themselves as the sources of their fanciful representations of the world'.[78] By obliterating their origins, metarepresentations which had been stored 'under advisement' in limited cognitive databases transform into semantic memories – shared cultural knowledge about the world – which are then allowed to circulate freely within our cognitive system.[79] Semantic memories are believed to be natural rather than socially-constructed, and therefore, they are difficult to challenge. Like semantic memories, myths call for absolute assent and universal validity because they are not perceived to come from specific sources. As we will see in the novels under discussion, this cognitive conceptualisation of myth as unattributed thought is central to Spark's fiction, whose 'Quixotic' characters either normalise their own representations of the world or internalise other characters' judgements as if they were their own.

From the early days of the rise of fascism, intellectuals such as Walter Benjamin and Hannah Arendt reflected on how totalitarian leaders appeared able to make their citizens believe in far-fetched myths at the expense of reality. As mentioned previously, from a top-down perspective, Benjamin blamed the aestheticization of politics for the rise of Nazism.[80] Drawing on the 19th-century philosophy of 'art for art's sake', which declared the autonomy of art from other human endeavours, Benjamin problematizes the projection of aesthetic autonomy onto the realm of politics, which can easily result in an aesthetics of violence. Shared by both fascism and anarchism, this approach is best illustrated by the response of Symbolist poet Laurent Tailhade to a deadly anarchist bomb attack in the French Chamber of Deputies in 1893: 'What do the victims matter if the gesture is beautiful?'[81] Such remark demonstrates the barbarism arising from the importation of artistic detachment into the realm of human rights. From a bottom-up perspective, and somewhat anticipating Kermode, Arendt argued that the masses can be led to believe in fictions because they give consistency to their lives, in contrast to the disturbing and incoherent nature of historical and political events:

> What the masses refuse to recognize is the fortuitousness that pervades reality. They are predisposed to all ideologies because they explain facts as mere examples of laws and eliminate coincidences by inventing an all-embracing omnipotence which is supposed to be at the root of every accident. Totalitarian propaganda thrives on this escape from reality into fiction, from coincidence into consistency.[82]

Arendt notes that the weakening of class membership arising from the emergence of nationalism generated a 'highly atomized society' in which individuals felt isolated and deprived of

[78] Zunshine, p. 75.
[79] Zunshine, pp. 50-1.
[80] Benjamin, 'The Work of Art', pp. 234-5.
[81] This comment was made at a banquet organised by the Symbolist journal *La Plume* in 1893 and received notorious press coverage.
[82] Arendt, *Origins of Totalitarianism*, pp. 351-2.

traditional social structures.[83] As a result, they became an easy prey for totalitarian movements which promised to relieve them of their economic and social distress while providing a much-needed sense of community. The member of the mass embraces a totalitarian ideology partly because he or she 'derives [their] sense of having a place in the world only from [their] belonging to a movement, [their] membership in the party'.[84] However, their identity within the group is solely established through their relationship with the leader and the member of the mass still remains essentially isolated from other members of the group. In this context, Spark's flexible understanding of morality – the result of her negotiation between moral law and consequentialism in relation to her PWE work – relies on historical contingency rather than mythology, and, therefore, shows potential for challenging the 'all-embracing omnipotence' that Arendt identifies as characteristic of fascism. In *Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego*, Sigmund Freud had already foreshadowed the behaviour of the fascist mass. He argued that the transformation of individuals into a mass is governed by libidinal ties, which allow individuals to 'throw off the repressions of [their] unconscious instincts', thereby indulging in primitive behaviour which opposes rationality.[85] In contrast, the bond between the leader and the mass is established through suggestion – the maintenance of libidinal energy on an unconscious level so that it can be directed towards a political aim – and narcissistic identification – the transference of our ego ideal onto the figure of the omnipotent leader.[86] By presenting himself as both an outstanding individual and a member of the 'folk', the totalitarian leader identifies as an 'enlargement' of his followers. In addition, totalitarian leaders often employ charismatic leadership to create a faithful group of followers who can facilitate the attainment of their goals. [87] Shaping their movements as revolutionary forces seeking to build new futures, charismatic leaders often position themselves as messianic figures with the mission of leading their societies to prosperity. With fanatic self-confidence in their purpose and their ability to achieve it, they are capable of inspiring and comforting the distressed mass. For example, charismatic leaders often flatter their followers in such a way that the gratification individuals derive from the leader is too great to allow doubt. Yet they also make use of negative attachment, such as scapegoating, for the creation of a mass of followers through the individual terror of exclusion. Indeed, Freud pointed out that hatred

[83] Arendt, *Origins of Totalitarianism*, p. 317.
[84] Arendt, *Origins of Totalitarianism*, p. 324.
[85] Sigmund Freud, *Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego* (London: The Hogarth Press, 1949), pp. 9-10.
[86] Freud, pp. 33-40, pp. 60-70.
[87] I am using Max Weber's concept of the charismatic leader, defined as 'he [who] is set apart from ordinary men and treated as endowed with supernatural, superhuman, or at least specifically exceptional powers or qualities.' (p. 358). See Max Weber, *The Theory of Social and Economic Organization* (Glencoe, IL: Free Press, 1947).

can often act as a unifying principle so that 'the follower, simply through belonging to the in-group, is better, higher and purer than those who are excluded'.[88]

As mentioned above, charismatic leaders often make use of paranoia and conspiracy theories to encourage others to share their beliefs. Drawing on Friedrich Nietzsche's idea of self-creation and William James's 'The Will to Believe', the poet Wallace Stevens theorised his concept of the 'supreme fiction' in the 1940s.[89] A supreme fiction can be defined as

> a specific idea, known to be a fiction, that would be as valid and fulfilling as the idea of God, and which people could will themselves to believe. By willfully believing in this fictive idea, they might compensate for whatever has been lacking since the generally proclaimed loss of belief in God.[90]

Stevens initially equated his supreme fiction with poetry, suggesting a strong connection to the aesthetic realm, but later acknowledged that he did not know exactly what he meant by the term.[91] While Stevens struggled to define a supreme fiction, totalitarian regimes such as National Socialism were putting the idea into practice. As Jonathan Glover notes, Hitler and his followers adopted 'hardness and inhumanity […] as desirable in themselves, aspects of an identity that expressed "the will to create mankind anew"'.[92] For example, the myth of the Aryan race transformed antisemitism from a conviction into a marker of identity which justified the Final Solution and the concept of 'Volksgemeinschaft' [people's community] which promoted racial equality among Germans, was similarly instrumental for the othering of non-German citizens and the legitimation of scientific racism.[93] Consequently, mythmaking has often been associated with the rise of totalitarian movements that sought to impose their fictions on reality.

Yet as Delmer's cinematic anecdote demonstrates, mythmaking was by no means restricted to totalitarian regimes. In fact, the PWE played a crucial role in the creation of myths to further the Allied cause, some of which would become enacted or tested in reality. In addition to the aforementioned Peace Putsch narrative, a number of rumours concocted by the PWE proved themselves real, or even exceeded reality. For example, a rumour was planned suggesting that the British had mounted anti-tank

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[88] Theodor W. Adorno, 'Freudian Theory and the Pattern of Fascist Propaganda', in *The Essential Frankfurt School Reader*, ed. by Andrew Arato and Eike Gebhardt (New York: Continuum, 1982), pp. 118-37 (p. 130).
[89] According to Nietzsche, self-creation is the construction of 'human beings who are new, unique, incomparable, who give themselves laws, who create themselves' – see *The Gay Science* (New York: Vintage Books, 1974), p. 335. William James's argument in 'The Will to Believe' is that, when a hypothesis is presented as 'a real possibility', humans are able to believe in it despite the absence of validating evidence – see Gregory Brazeal, 'The Supreme Fiction: Fiction or Fact?', *Journal of Modern Literature*, 31 (2007), 80-100 (p. 96).
[90] Brazeal, p. 84.
[91] Brazeal, p. 90-2.
[92] Jonathan Glover, *Humanity: A Moral History of the Twentieth Century* (London: Pimlico, 2001), p. 327.
[93] Arendt, *Origins of Totalitarianism*, pp. 356-60.

weapons on aircraft, but had to be discarded because these had indeed been developed (*BL*, 18). Rumour S/15, dating from 1941, constitutes a more chilling example: 'The Superintendent of the Bethel Hospital for Incurables has been sent to Dachau for refusing to permit the inhabitants to be put in a lethal chamber'.[94] As Marc Argemi and Gary Alan Fine have pointed out, not only were euthanasia killings a reality from 1941 to 1945, but the numbers of disabled people murdered by the Nazi regime have been shown to be far higher than this rumour suggests.[95]

Following the Second World War and the Holocaust, Muriel Spark was part of a generation of post-war novelists who were preoccupied with the magnetic influence of mythmakers and their encouragement of others to enact dangerous myths in reality. Alongside her novels *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie*, *The Abbess of Crewe*, and *The Takeover*, John Fowles' *The Magus* (1965) is a prominent fictional exploration of mythmaking, providing an existentialist perspective that complements Spark's more overtly political interest in this theme. Fowles' *The Magus* explores the concept of choice in a God-less world and the moral consequences of imposing imagination upon reality – ideas that were closely associated with the dilemmas resulting from the French experience of the Second World War. In particular, Sartre's idea that existence precedes essence helped to present individuals as 'fundamentally free to choose, even in circumstances which are *prima facie* constraining, like the war situation in France', thereby positioning existentialism as a philosophy of the present with the potential to bring about new beginnings.[96]

The novel narrates the experiences of Nicholas Urfe, a young English schoolmaster who is hired to work at the Lord Byron School in the Greek island of Phraxos. Soon after his arrival, he meets the mysterious Mr. Conchis, whose controversial behaviour during the Nazi occupation of the island has become the subject of local lore. Conchis is presented as a mythological figure who evades historical development. He is a foreign-looking man 'whose age was impossible to tell' and whose eyes were 'not quite human'.[97] On his visits to Conchis' home at Bourani, Nicholas soon becomes an unwitting actor in 'the godgame', the performance of deceptive, and often immoral, masques and mysteries which progressively lead him to question his complacently accepted views on himself and the world. Through the narrative and performative re-enactment of episodes from Conchis' life, including his experiences during the First World War and the Nazi occupation of Greece, Conchis creates a world of myth '[w]ith himself cast as God' despite his insistence that 'hazard rules everything'.[98] By replacing God as teleological power, Conchis, much like Miss Brodie, is able to reduce other human beings to puppets

[94] HS 6/946, Propaganda Whispers, D/Q (30.03.1941) to H/C, TNA, UK.
[95] Marc Argemi and Gary Alan Fine, 'Faked News: The Politics of Rumour in British World War II Propaganda', *Journal of War & Culture Studies*, 12 (2019), 176-93 (p. 188).
[96] Patrick Baert, *The Existentialist Moment: The Rise of Sartre as a Public Intellectual* (Cambridge: Polity, 2015), pp. 145-6.
[97] John Fowles, *The Magus* (London: Vintage, 2004), p. 79.
[98] Fowles, p. 339.

controlled by his will, thus disregarding the rule of hazard he claims to uphold. For example, Nicholas notes the impossibility of Conchis' characters remaining mysterious to him because 'it was only too clearly a very limited freedom and mystery he wanted in us; however large a maze the scientist builds, its purpose is still to allow him to watch every move', a description which mirrors Spark's theological understanding of the limits of human freedom under God. [99]

Despite his awareness that 'the godgame' is causing Nicholas physical and emotional distress, Conchis remains a trickster mythologizer who refuses to abide by moral rules. In the words of Lily de Seitas, one of Conchis' associates,

> …if one is trying to reproduce, however partially, something of the mysterious purposes that govern existence, then one also has to go beyond some of the conventions man has invented to keep those purposes at bay. That doesn't mean that in our ordinary lives we think such conventions should be swept away. Far from it. They are *necessary fictions* (my emphasis). But in the godgame we start from the premise that in reality all is fiction, yet no single fiction is necessary.[100]

Although myths can provide comfort by neglecting historical and political circumstances, *The Magus* poignantly suggests that there is no deterrent to the existential angst resulting from individual choice. For example, when describing his role in the First World War, Conchis points out that the conflict resulted from 'our believing that we were fulfilling some end, serving some plan' instead of realising that '[t]here is no plan. All is hazard. And the only thing that will preserve us is ourselves'.[101] It is only by rejecting the consequentialist appeal of mythmaking that individuals can exercise thoughtfulness. While Nicholas could have refused the lure of Conchis' myths, their aesthetic power was too alluring for him to ignore, to the extent that, towards the end of the novel, Nicholas' greatest resentment is *'[n]ot that he had done what he did, but that he had stopped doing it*'.[102] Living in 'bad faith', Nicholas thus refuses to exercise his freedom, much like the Frenchmen who declined to join the French resistance during the Second World War.

4. Discarding History for Mythology: Spark's Mythologizers

Spark's novel *Loitering with Intent* provides a useful introduction to her understanding of myth in relation to fiction. Reflecting on her creative practice, novelist Fleur Talbot points out that

> [w]ithout a mythology, a novel is nothing. The true novelist, one who understands the work as a continuous poem, is a myth-maker, and the wonder of the art resides in the endless different ways of telling a story, and the methods are mythological by nature (*LI*, 105).

[99] Fowles, p. 404.
[100] Fowles, p. 627.
[101] Fowles, p. 129.
[102] Fowles, p. 553.

Although, as Kermode notes, fictions are 'for finding things out' and require 'conditional assent', they still transmute the particular into the general in order to elicit critical thought.[103] By equating the novelist with the mythmaker, Fleur foregrounds the porous boundary between fiction and myth. Indeed, the novel issues a powerful warning about the artist's responsibility for their fictional creations, which remain at risk of being transformed into myths laying claims to reality. Fleur celebrates fiction as a useful tool to unearth hidden truths, yet she is aware that, in the hands of her evil employer Sir Quentin, imagination can easily feed into reality with tragic consequences. In fact, on realizing that Sir Quentin is enacting her 'myth', which culminates in Warrender Chase's death in a car crash, and subsequently receiving the news of Sir Quentin's actual death in a car crash, she recognizes that 'events as [she had] portrayed, even in a different way from the reality, could happen' (*LI*, 157). In what follows, I suggest that Spark's fictional mythologizers borrow the myth-making methods of Second World War propaganda, such as the neglect of history and politics in favour of aesthetics, the obsession with ends which justify the means, the twist of old myths to create new ones, and the power of charismatic leadership, in their attempts to convert their idealised versions of the world into reality. To illustrate these issues, I draw on examples from three novels which feature Spark's foremost mythologizers – Miss Brodie in *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie*, Sister Alexandra in *The Abbess of Crewe* and Hubert Mallindaine in *The Takeover*.

In *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie*, Miss Brodie is presented as a charismatic teacher who embraces precisely the kind of aestheticist understanding of the world characterised by Kermode as the mode of the mythologizer. Adopting a corrupt version of the transcendental aesthetics of Swiss theologian Hans Urs von Balthasar, Miss Brodie teaches her students that 'Goodness, Truth and Beauty' come before 'Safety' and that 'Art comes first and then science', exhibiting a total commitment to the imagination (*PMJB*, 7, 22).[104] Furthermore, Miss Brodie's invitation to her students – 'Follow me' – directly replicates Jesus' appeal to his disciples, which contributes to her symbolic erection as a God-like figure (*PMJB*, 7). Like a totalitarian leader, Miss Brodie 'choose[s] those elements from existing ideologies which are best fitted to become the fundaments of another, entirely fictitious world'.[105] For example, Miss Brodie first introduces her ex-lover as 'a stereotypical version of Robert Burns' before endowing him with the attributes of her new love interests, the art teacher Mr. Lloyd and the music

[103] Kermode, *Sense of an Ending*, p. 39.
[104] Hans Urs von Balthasar theorises the 'transcendental' properties of being – Truth, Beauty and Goodness – as 'a differentiated unity in which the truth of divine agency (the logic) emerges as endlessly enchanting (the aesthetics), thus signalling that it will be the way through to the supreme good (the dramatics).' Such transcendental properties 'are never found alone' (p. 160). See Aidan Nichols, 'The Theo-logic', in *The Cambridge Companion to Hans Urs von Balthasar*, ed. by Edward T. Oakes, S. J. and David Moss (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), pp. 158-71.
[105] Arendt, *Origins of Totalitarianism*, pp. 361-2.

teacher Mr. Lowther: ‘Sometimes Hugh would sing, he had a rich tenor voice. At other times he fell silent and would set up his easel and paint’ (*PMJB*, 71).[106]

In contrast to her teacher, Sandy Stranger shows an awareness of historical reality seeping through the cracks of Miss Brodie’s imaginary world. For example, a trip to Edinburgh's Old Town, where ‘[a] man sat on the icy-cold pavement’ and ‘a crowd of children [were playing] without shoes’, gives her a terrifying insight into poverty and social inequality (*PMJB*, 30). Moreover, her science class experiments, in which ‘not even Miss Lockhart knew what the result might be, and anything might occur between their going in and coming out’ provides her with a glimpse of the freedom existing beyond the confines of Miss Brodie’s class, where objectivity is always the result of Miss Brodie’s tastes, and censorship is commonplace (*PMJB*, 75). However, unlike Miss Brodie’s class, the science class relies on material and sensory perception to draw evidence-based conclusions, thereby acting as a site of resistance to the fanciful mythmaking of Miss Brodie.[107] For example, Miss Brodie’s conviction that Giotto is objectively the greatest Italian painter results from her transformation of a metarepresentation into a semantic memory; when ‘Miss Brodie thinks’ disappears as marker of subjectivity, ‘Giotto is the greatest Italian painter’ is presented as self-evident (*PMJB*, 7). Furthermore, Miss Brodie exercises censorship of what she deems inappropriate reading, for example, by tearing Mary Macgregor’s comic paper ‘beyond redemption’ (*PMBJ*, 8).

In fact, Miss Brodie embodies the ‘latent fascism among British fellow-travellers’, expressing strong approval of the totalitarian regimes rising in Italy and Germany, whose heroic leaders have arguably wiped out unemployment.[108] Only after the end of the war does Miss Brodie concede that Hitler was actually ‘rather naughty’, even though she overall still remains in denial concerning Nazi myths; in contrast, Sandy stages a return to history, noting that ‘it [does] not seem necessary that the world should be saved, only that the poor people in the streets and slums of Edinburgh should be relieved’ (*PMJB*, 123). Like Mussolini and Hitler, Miss Brodie believes that the ends justify the means, and therefore pays no attention to morality when exercising her will. Much like Conchis in *The Magus*, she has elected herself to grace like ‘the God of Calvin’ and claims to see ‘the beginning and the end’ through her sense of predestination (*PMJB*, 121). Yet Sandy soon recognizes the failures of her omniscience and the problematic nature of her mythmaking. For instance, Miss Brodie’s plot to encourage her student Rose to sleep with Mr. Lloyd backfires when Sandy becomes Mr. Lloyd’s lover, leading Sandy to feel ‘more affection for her in her later years […] when she thought upon Miss Brodie as silly’ (*PMJB*, 112). On realizing that the ultimate result of Miss Brodie’s plotting is the enactment

[106] Carruthers, p. 499.
[107] In George Orwell’s *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, Winston similarly attempts to resist the Party’s propaganda by reminding himself that ‘[s]tones are hard, water is wet, objects unsupported fall towards the earth’s centre.’ See George Orwell, *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (London: Penguin, 2003).
[108] Allan Hepburn, *A Grain of Faith: Religion in Mid-Century British Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), p. 157.

of her imagination upon reality, Sandy decides to report her teacher's fascism to the headmistress, thereby 'putting a stop to Miss Brodie' (*PMJB*, 125).

Yet for most of the novel, the girls exhibit an unwavering loyalty towards their beloved teacher, who deploys charismatic leadership to constitute and consolidate her group of followers. Like the member of the mass whose main commitment belongs to the leader, Miss Brodie's girls have 'no team spirit and very little in common with each other outside their continuing friendship with Jean Brodie' (*PMJB*, 2). Using her recurrently mentioned prime as a shield against reality, Miss Brodie builds a messianic image of herself that opposes the historically contingent lives of the girls' parents who 'don't have primes [but] have sexual intercourse' (*PMJB*, 13). She endows each of her girls with a different talent and flatters them when she asks them to exercise it; for example, she gets Sandy to read poetry in order to admire her English vowel sounds and gets Eunice to do a somersault to appreciate her gymnastic ability (*PMJB*, 3). However, Miss Brodie also makes use of negative attachment by presenting her student Mary Macgregor, who was 'famous for being stupid and always to blame', as the scapegoat of the group (*PMJB*, 10). Mary Macgregor is regularly mocked by the other girls, yet she is ironically the glue that brings them together. For example, when Sandy was tempted to be nice to Mary Macgregor, she became terrified 'since by this action she would separate herself, and be lonely, and blameable in a more dreadful way than Mary who, although officially the faulty one, was at least inside Miss Brodie's category of heroines in the making' (*PMJB*, 28). Sandy's reaction exemplifies the terror of exclusion shared by members of the mass, who are afraid of losing their sense of belonging by shedding group thinking and embracing independent critical thought.

Another of Spark's mythologizers, Sister Alexandra in *The Abbess of Crewe*, is a similarly messianic figure, given her belief that her destiny is to become Abbess. In her attempts to persuade her fellow nuns to support her claim, she propagandistically and flamboyantly discards history for mythology:

> Here, in the Abbey of Crewe, we have discarded history. We have entered the sphere, dear Sisters, of mythology. My nuns love it. Who doesn't yearn to be part of a myth at whatever the price in comfort? The monastic system is in revolt throughout the rest of the world, thanks to historical development. Here, within the ambience of mythology, we have consummate satisfaction, we have peace (*AC*, 9).

The so-called 'peace' in the Abbey of Crewe, which echoes Stevens' idea of the supreme fiction as source of emotional fulfilment, is achieved through the replacement of challenging historical and political facts with the solipsistic aestheticism promulgated by Abbess Alexandra, which saves the nuns the trouble of having to think for themselves.[109]

[109] In Wallace Stevens' 'Notes toward a Supreme Fiction', the poet, in reference to the supreme fiction he attempts to delineate, notes that '[t]he vivid transparence that you bring is peace' (p. 380) – see *The Collected Poems of Wallace Stevens* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1971), pp. 380-408.

In this mythological realm, truth no longer requires the confirmation of its claims in referential anchorage. In order to get elected as Abbess and to direct attention away from the scandal of Sister Felicity sleeping with a Jesuit, Abbess Alexandra selects those 'facts' which are relevant to her point of view and uses them to elaborate plausible narratives to suit the occasion, some of which become solidified into myths. For example, Abbess Alexandra deliberately misinterprets Sister Felicity's socialist and free love advocacy, claiming that 'she wants an open audit of all the dowries and she advocates indiscreet sex' as a means of discrediting her political opponent (*AC*, 33). In addition to spreading disinformation, Abbess Alexandra, like Miss Brodie, is also a mythologizer who forces others to enact her beliefs. For example, she presses Sister Gertrude to cope with the story of her having been sent on a mission by the Abbey because '[s]he fits the rhetoric of the occasion' (*AC*, 19). Consequently, truth is rendered trivial; in Abbess Alexandra's own words, 'to look for the truth of the matter will be like looking for the lost limbs, toes and fingernails of a body blown to pieces in an air crash' (*AC*, 70). However, her inability to face the damaging consequences of her mythmaking eventually leads to her potential excommunication by Rome. As Sister Gertrude warns her, mythological garble may suit the media, but '[i]n Rome, they deal with realities' (*AC*, 86). In a final flight from history into mythology, Abbess Alexandra is aesthetically rendered as a tape of her selected transcripts, entitled *The Abbess of Crewe*. By denying the contingencies of history, she has become an enduring 'object of art, the end of which is to give pleasure' (*AC*, 86).

In *The Takeover*, Hubert Mallindaine erects himself as a religious leader in order to promulgate his suspect views among his community. He lives in a house on the banks of Lake Nemi, owned by American millionaire Maggie Radcliffe, who has grown tired of him to the point of cutting off his allowance and trying to evict him. To make ends meet, Hubert decides to sell Maggie's Louis XIV chairs and her famous paintings, replacing them with fakes, yet he is careful to maintain the house in disrepair to prove his slender means (another example of the fraudulent use of evidence to back up a deception). To gain prestige and power, Hubert has unproblematically accepted his eccentric aunts' dubious claim that they are in fact the descendants of Goddess Diana of Nemi: 'They sprouted ancestors before them, springing from nowhere into the ever more present past, until Hubert had a genealogy before him' (*T*, 84). Like Abbess Alexandra, Hubert's belief in the subjectivity of reality leads him to manufacture it for his own benefit. Reacting against the ontological realism of the Jesuit priests he encounters, Hubert claims that absolute truths do not exist and therefore '[a]pperances *are* reality' (*T*, 90). Following this principle, Hubert uses his ancestral claim to create a religious cult of Diana with himself as high priest. However, when his secretary Pauline inopportunely unearths 'evidence that his aunts, infatuated by Sir James Frazer and his *Golden Bough* […] had been in correspondence with the quack genealogist [and] instructed him in the plainest terms to establish their descent from the goddess Diana', Hubert rejects this archival evidence in favour of the allegory of myth.[110]

In doing so, he emphasises the importance of self-confidence for deception, claiming that 'it frequently over-rides with an orgulous scorn any small blatant contradictory facts which might lead a simple mind to feel a reasonable perplexity and a sharp mind to feel definite suspicion' (*T*, 131-2). This belief evokes Hitler's idea of the 'big lie' in propaganda, described as a falsity so colossal that the masses 'will not be able to believe in the possibility of such monstrous effrontery and infamous misrepresentation in others'.[111] Hubert's mythological lineage is blatantly fake, yet its aesthetic power is such that it enchants not only his neighbours, most of whom become members of the flock, but even the mythmaker himself:

> [H]e had got into a habit of false assumptions by the imperceptible encroachment of his new cult; so ardently had he been preaching the efficacy of prayer that he now, without thinking, silently invoked the name of Diana for every desire that passed through his head, wildly believing that her will not only existed but would certainly come to pass (*T*, 182-3).

Conclusion

Drawing on her PWE experience, Spark constructs plausible narratives and myths with the methods of propaganda as a means of testing the precarious boundary between reality and fiction. Her application of these methods to fictional practice exposes the manifold ways in which writers and characters manipulate their worlds with a view to deceive themselves, as well as others. In doing so, Spark highlights the dangers of moral absolutism and personal delusion, which have the potential of subjecting individuals to social and political exploitation. In 'The Desegregation of Art' (1971), Spark advocated 'the arts of satire and of ridicule' as 'the only honourable weapon we have left' in the battle against oppression (DA, 35). This chapter has suggested that her use of PWE strategies contributes to laying bare the fabricated nature of fiction and can therefore be framed as part of a rhetorical mode which challenges absurd realities by mocking them. Such a rhetorical mode, Ali Smith claims, makes Spark's fiction particularly timely today because she 'hands us the key to the demystification of [an age] in which living means having powerful fictions nationally, internationally and politically foisted upon us'.[112]

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[110] James George Frazer points out that 'many myths, which we now know only as myths, had once their counterpart in magic [and] used to be acted as a means of producing in fact the events which they describe in figurative language', a remark which strongly resonates with Hubert's adoption of fiction to control reality. See *The Golden Bough: A Study in Magic and Religion* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020), p. 651.

[111] Hitler, pp. 231-2.

[112] Ali Smith, *In the Spirit of Spark: The Muriel Spark Society Lecture* (Edinburgh: Polygon, 2018), p. 40.

2. The Ethics of Deception: Propaganda and the Unsentimental Novel

Introduction

Following the closure of the PWE radio station *Soldatensender Calais* in April 1945, Delmer retreated to his bathroom and performed a purification ritual to mark the end of black propaganda:

> I removed my beard. [...] After my razor shaved the soap sodden whiskers from my face I gazed into the mirror with all the horror of Dorian Grey [sic], confronting his tell-tale portrait. There, staring at me, was the pallid, flabby-mouthed face of a crook. Was this, I asked myself, what four years of 'black' had done to Denis Sefton Delmer? (*BB*, 217-8)

Despite the jocose and unsentimental tone of his memoir *Black Boomerang*, Delmer's perceived resemblance to the depraved literary character Dorian Gray from Oscar Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1890) points to the existence of moral qualms about the nature of his wartime work. Indeed, some of the plausible narratives created by Delmer's team were used to enact harmful attacks on enemy civilians as part of PWE campaigns.

The 'posting jobs', for example, stand out as particularly macabre when measured against what some commentators believed to be the limited contribution of black propaganda to the Allied cause (*BB*, 133-5).[1] PWE propagandists would send letters to the relatives of German soldiers who had died in military hospitals in Italy, naming a fictional valuable item in their possession and giving reassurance that it would be passed on to their families. When the item never materialised, the letter was expected to prompt relatives to view German officers as 'corpse robbers'. Another letter informed the families that their soldiers had died from lethal injections intended to free up beds. Most strikingly, PWE officers replied to letters sent to soldiers presumed dead by their families – these were termed 'dead letters' –, pretending to be the deceased soldiers, who said they were alive and well in a neutral country and asked their families not to tell anyone (knowing that, in fact, they almost certainly would tell, thereby increasing belief in desertion as a viable option).

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[1] In his review of Sefton Delmer's *Black Boomerang*, Richard Crossman, Head of the German Section of PWE (1941-3), suggested that black propaganda had made an insignificant contribution to the Allied victory: '...would victory have been delayed for a day if "black" had been forbidden and all our efforts had been concentrating on perfecting a white propaganda ...? I suspect the answer is no.' See R. H. S. Crossman, 'Black Prima Donna' (Review of D. Sefton Delmer, *Black Boomerang*), *New Statesman*, 9th November 1962, pp. 676-7 (p. 677). Such assertion partly stemmed from Crossman's belief in the superiority of white propaganda, but also pointed to the difficulties in measuring the results of black propaganda operations. As Charles Cruikshank points out, the joint efforts of propaganda and military dominance had a genuine effect on German morale, yet "there is no way of segregating the relative importance of the two elements." See Cruikshank, *The Fourth Arm*, p. 174.

In contrast to Delmer's account, Spark's description of her 'wonderfully interesting' intelligence role at the PWE does not appear to present any such pangs of conscience (*CV*, 147). While she notes that '[t]he methods of Delmer's M.B unit horrified a few cabinet ministers' – possibly referring to Stafford Cripps's criticism of the occasional use of pornography in PWE propaganda to Germany – Spark acknowledges that her boss was the subject of much admiration (including her own) (*CV*, 148).[2] Such divergent afterthoughts on black propaganda appear to reflect their professional interests. Delmer's journalistic training most likely accounted for his uneasiness about tampering with 'facts'. In contrast, Spark's budding writerly creativity already thrived on the manipulation of facts in the service of creating imaginary worlds, and her autobiographical accounts foreground the 'inventive' rather than propagandistic nature of her secret service work.[3]

The question of whether the PWE's ethically dubious methods were justified in the fight against Nazism was in fact the subject of much debate within the organization, as archival documents demonstrate. In a 1943 PWE lecture entitled 'Political Warfare', Colonel Sedgwick, an instructor at the Political Warfare Executive Training School, argues that the rightness or wrongness of a propaganda campaign is to be determined by its outcome in order to condone the use of black propaganda:

> [A]s far as covert propaganda is concerned I will venture the purely personal opinion that it would be absurd to be squeamish. If by hitting the Germans below the belt we can shorten the war, and perhaps save a million lives I hope we shall be prepared to hit them below the belt every time...[4]

However, not all propagandists were of the same mind. In a 1962 review of Delmer's *Black Boomerang*, Richard Crossman, Head of the German Section of the PWE (1941-3), described black propaganda as 'nihilistic in purpose and solely destructive in effect' and expressed serious misgivings regarding 'whether this decision to plunge far below the Nazis' own level of lying, half-lying and news perversion was justified'.[5] This remark stems from Crossman's belief that black propaganda was of little use when compared with the merits of the BBC's commitment to truthfulness. Even among those who appreciated its value, there were still disagreements

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[2] At the beginning of the Second World War, Delmer used pornography sporadically in his first black radio station *Der Chef* (May 1941 - November 1943) with the aim of gathering an audience, which was a difficult endeavour due to short-wave broadcasting. As the war progressed, *Der Chef* had access to better intelligence and had managed to achieve quick popularity, so Delmer was able to minimise the pornographic output. Before this, however, the translated script of a broadcast describing a German admiral's orgy reached Stafford Cripps, then Minister of Aircraft Production, who was morally outraged and complained to Foreign Secretary Anthony Eden: 'If this is the sort of thing we have to do to win the war, I would rather lose it!' See 'H.M.G.'s Secret Pornographer', *The Times Literary Supplement*, 21st February 1972, pp. 63-4.

[3] Devoize and Valette, 'Muriel Spark - b. 1918', pp. 243-54 <http://jsse.revues.org/328>

[4] FO 898/99, Lectures. 1943.

[5] R. H. S. Crossman, 'Black Prima Donna', p. 677.

regarding the use of 'the moral approach' in PWE broadcasts. Noel Newsome, BBC Director of European Broadcasting, reacted against 'those of our propagandists who urge us to [...] eschew history, philosophy and religion in our broadcasts' because 'any propaganda which is not essentially moral must be colourless and empty'.[6] Others, such as PWE propagandist Robert Walsmley, were reluctant to blend the Allied cause with Christian ethics because they felt it 'would nauseate listeners with our hypocrisy [and] would only produce the impression that we wanted to appear religious'.[7] Delmer eventually created a religious radio station, 'Christ the King', in which 'Father Andreas' – a pseudonym of genuine Austrian priest Father Elmar Eisenberger – attacked the anti-Christian values and the moral corruption of the Nazi regime (*BB*, 121-3); however, most PWE propaganda campaigns retained a more strategic and pragmatic focus.

Even though *Curriculum Vitae* suggests she did not always feel entirely comfortable with the deception operations orchestrated by Delmer's team, Spark was far from 'squeamish' and refrained from condemning PWE work. Spark thus occupied a complex moral position: she was aware that PWE propaganda transgressed moral boundaries by deliberately seeking to mislead the enemy, yet she understood that, in the total war scenario brought about by the outbreak of the Second World War, there was a powerful moral argument for the use of deception as a means of shortening the conflict. Whilst PWE propaganda can arguably be justified as a 'state of exception' in the war against fascism (see pp. 65-6), Spark was concerned by the perpetuation of covert propaganda in post-war culture, which she viewed as no longer justified. In fact, her fiction is often preoccupied with how politically expedient actions may be tainted by ethical misgivings, possibly inspired by the increasing normalisation of disinformation in the post-war period. How did Spark's PWE experience influence her subsequent negotiation of morally ambiguous behaviour in her fiction? I suggest that Spark's formative involvement in black propaganda – a valuable training in the art of 'making patterns with facts' (*PMJB*, 71) – strengthened her belief in fiction as a powerful medium capable of offering alternative views which can guide our judgement, particularly at uncertain times that elicited the solace of dangerous political ideologies. Like fiction, British black propaganda broadcasting was not prescriptive; it made 'no direct attempt to order listeners to do anything', instead allowing them to 'ponder the news story' and act 'of their own volition'.[8] Spark's fiction similarly seeks to expose how facts can be

[6] FO 898/181, Propaganda and Policy Plans. 1939-41. Allied Propaganda in World War II: The Complete Record of the Political Warfare Executive (FO 898). TNA, UK. *Archives Unbound*. Web. 14 Jan. 2020.
[7] FO 898/177, Religious Broadcasts to Germans: Policy. 1939-42. Allied Propaganda in World War II: The Complete Record of the Political Warfare Executive (FO 898). TNA, UK. *Archives Unbound*. Web. 14 Jan. 2020.
[8] Cruickshank, p. 80.

manipulated and encourage readers to remain sceptical of unverified information and think for themselves.

Spark's interest in the ethics of deception, particularly in her early novels, has traditionally been subsumed under the examination of her Catholic faith. Ruth Whittaker's *The Faith and Fiction of Muriel Spark*, for instance, argues that Spark's Christian worldview shaped her writing of fiction 'from a moral standpoint'.[9] Such equation of morality with religion forecloses any considerations of the influence that Spark's participation in covert propaganda operations may have had on her ethical stance. Turning away from the Catholic Spark, Marina Mackay and Lyndsey Stonebridge have admirably demonstrated that Spark's ethical influences are not only theological, but also historically rooted in the Second World War and the Holocaust. As mentioned in the Introduction, Mackay's 'Muriel Spark and the Meaning of Treason' explores the influence of Spark's intelligence work with POWs, who were responsible for voicing black propaganda, on her understanding of the legitimacy of treason.[10] She contends that such an experience encouraged Spark's flexible understanding of morality and perceptive acknowledgement of 'realities that are plural, contingent, provisional, and amenable to creative transformation'.[11] Stonebridge's *The Judicial Imagination* provides a comprehensive reading of Spark's *The Mandelbaum Gate* from a political perspective. Placing Spark amid religious and secular responses to the 1961 trial of Nazi war criminal Adolf Eichmann, which she herself attended as a reporter for the *Observer*, Stonebridge argues that Spark embraces 'the extravagant powers of fiction' to interrogate traumatic historical events such as the Holocaust because, unlike Eichmann's mechanical discourse, they supply 'a way of keeping the wound between speech and atrocity open'.[12]

This chapter contends that Spark's intelligence work provides a useful lens through which to explore her interest in the ethics of deception. I argue that Spark's fiction resembles black propaganda insofar as it adopts and morally justifies an ethics of deception in the context of historical states of exception such as the Second World War and the Holocaust. I begin with a discussion of Spark's negotiation of national and personal loyalties at times of national conflict before turning to the pedagogic potential of democratic propaganda to resist totalitarian ideologies, which I argue becomes particularly significant in the context of states of exception. Then, I explore Spark's fictional rendering of the complexities of encountering foreign nationals,

[9] Whittaker, p. 11.
[10] Mackay, 'Muriel Spark and the Meaning of Treason', pp. 505-6.
[11] Mackay, 'Muriel Spark and the Meaning of Treason', p. 521.
[12] Lyndsey Stonebridge, *The Judicial Imagination: Writing After Nuremberg* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2011), p. 75, p. 81.

followed by an examination of how Spark's unsentimental mode of novel-writing draws on her ethics of deception. Through examples from *The Comforters* (1957), *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie* (1961), *The Mandelbaum Gate* (1965), *The Driver's Seat* (1970), *The Hothouse by the East River* (1973), *Loitering with Intent* (1981) and *A Far Cry from Kensington* (1988), I suggest that Spark's PWE work is at the root of her fictional embrace of an ethics of deception – defined as a situational ethics that recognises the need to prioritise the 'moral imagination', 'what matters humanly rather than the current norm or the official policy', when exercising political judgement – and an unsentimental mode of fiction-writing, even if such strategies might appear morally suspect at times.[13] In doing so, I suggest that the moral framework of Spark's fiction moved progressively and substantially from religion to politics, as she considered how best to respond to the afterlives of ethically troublesome historical events.

1. Negotiating Personal and National Loyalties

At the beginning of the Second World War, one of the key moral considerations regarding the status of German citizens was the distinction between 'good Germans' and Nazis. Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain, best-known for his foreign policy of appeasement, initially insisted on the innocence of German people, who he believed had simply been misled by their authoritarian government. Influenced by this view, the PWE 'had considered making British propaganda to Germany less harsh, but rejected that option because of the fear of splitting public opinion at home and causing misgivings among some of Britain's allies'.[14] By 1945, however, BBC propaganda fully aligned with Britain's policy of unconditional surrender and German citizens were rendered complicit with National Socialism. The PWE recording studio at Milton Bryan, however, was a unique setting insofar as PWE propagandists worked hand in hand with POWs, who provided the German voices for the black propaganda broadcasts targeted at the German military and civilians. According to Spark, these were 'truly patriotic Germans', employed in a role in which 'they could oppose Hitler and the Nazis' (*CV*, 151). Her autobiography recalls fondly the English wartime countryside, where she was 'allowed to take those brave POWs, who were risking so much to smash Hitler, for a walk or bicycle ride within a five-mile radius of the compound' (*CV*, 155). Mackay has drawn attention to Spark's unambiguous portrayal of 'German traitors as true German patriots' in *Curriculum Vitae*, an assessment which she problematizes in *The Hothouse by the East River*.[15]

[13] Glover, p. 409.
[14] Aaron Goldman, 'Germans and Nazis: The Controversy over "Vansittartism" in Britain during the Second World War', *Journal of Contemporary History*, 14 (1979), 155-91, (p. 162).
[15] Mackay, 'Muriel Spark and the Meaning of Treason', p. 511.

This is the novel that most openly draws on Spark's own intelligence work during the Second World War to investigate the post-war repercussions of secrecy and deception. Its protagonists, Elsa and Paul, have settled down in a hallucinatory version of post-war New York after carrying out secret work for Britain during the Second World War. In a twist towards the end of the novel, however, we learn that Paul and Elsa both died during an air raid in 1944. Their deathly existence is suddenly disturbed by Elsa's belief in the reappearance of Helmut Kiel, a German POW who had previously been presumed dead, in the guise of a shoe salesman. Paul first reacts to this news with disbelief because '[h]e died in prison with only himself to thank for it' (*HER*, 4). Or at least that is what was 'put out' and confirmed by documentary evidence of 'a Helmut Kiel, deceased, on the prison records at Hamburg' (*HER*, 9, 13). Far from satisfied by this evidence, Paul's wartime familiarity with rumours and forged documents leads him to believe that the POW must have secured 'every cover' and remains 'a definitive danger to his life' (*HER*, 13). Paul's fearfulness emerges from his guilt, for he proved to be a disloyal friend to Kiel and 'was instrumental' in sending Kiel back to the prison camp, having charged him with being a spy who had been 'in the S.S. all along' (*HER*, 56). Paul also suspected that Kiel may have sought to deliberately undermine British black propaganda because soon after returning to the prison camp

> he went on the air in a prisoners of war exchange-of-greetings programme. He sent a simple message to his mother and sister. But his voice was recognisable, you see. He'd been broadcasting for us. We were supposed to be an authentic underground German station (*HER*, 57-8).[16]

Paul's removal of Kiel appears to be motivated by a national concern which overlooks Kiel's loyalty to his German family, yet the embodiment of his guilt in the ghostly Kiel suggests the possibility of a personal, rather than political, motive.

Paul had engaged in a fight with Kiel over Elsa because she had been 'in difficulty with Kiel', being 'suspected of having an affair with him' (*HER*, 58). Towards the end of the novel, however, it emerges that Paul must also have had a sentimental relationship with Kiel because the shoe salesman reports that Paul wished 'to repeat the affair as an experiment, in order to establish [his] identity' (*HER*, 100). Was Kiel really a double agent or did Paul wish to get rid of him out of jealousy or shame about his homosexual feelings? Returning to 1944, Paul concedes that he is uncertain that Kiel was actually a spy, yet still defines him as 'a rotter'; in contrast, Elsa acknowledges the complexities of Kiel's predicament, noting that he was probably 'a loyal German at heart' and 'feels justified' (*HER*, 114). While *The Hothouse by the East River* reminds us that 'these German collaborators are still prisoners' (*HER*, 19), it draws on Second World War

[16] An almost identical incident, recalled by Spark in *Curriculum Vitae*, is most likely the inspiration for this fictional episode (p. 159).

black propaganda operations to question clear-cut understandings of identity based on national allegiance.

Reacting against the exclusionary tribal nationalism at the heart of Nazism, Spark is sceptical of the 'crowd emotions' involved in the promotion of national unity patriotism and foregrounds the significance of individual thinking (*CV*, 63). Such an approach is most likely influenced by her rejection of nationalist movements, in particular, of Scottish nationalism. In an interview with Lorna Sage, Spark explains that she is 'against any nationalist movement [because] they are fascist ultimately – out with the English, out with the Jews ...'[17] Against what she perceives as the narrow-mindedness of nationalism, Spark positions herself as a truly cosmopolitan writer who remains open to new, and potentially transformative, ways of thinking. However, she is aware that personal loyalties cannot hold unconditionally either: 'It's demanding too much of any human to ask them to be loyal to a party, to a system or a person for the whole of their life. To say "You owe me loyalty" is a terrible thing'.[18] This is precisely what Sandy Stranger means when stating that her teacher, Miss Brodie, was only due loyalty 'up to a point' (*PMJB*, 128). In fact, as Whittaker suggests, Spark often allows loyalty to be broken when "the interests of an individual come into conflict with what she sees as higher interests, either religious or moral", which implies a prioritization of the consequences of individual judgement.[19]

Yet in the context of Spark's black propaganda work, PWE methods appear excessively ruthless at times. The kind of detachment involved in such work resembles the aesthetic distance associated in the 1950s with the impersonal style of modernism, a detachment that allows the propagandist to temporarily suspend the historical self in order to engage in creative pursuits unrestrained by moral concerns.[20] An understanding of Milton Bryan as a morally separate domain 'more akin to surrealism than reality', emphasised by its rural location, may go some way towards explaining this phenomenon (*BG*, 44). For example, Jonathan Glover has drawn attention to the 'sense of unreality' surrounding extermination camps and how their 'unreal atmosphere enabled people to do things they would otherwise have found unthinkable'.[21] The analogy might be extended to centres for other kinds of political war work so, in the case of Milton Bryan, the blurred sense of morality might be seen not simply to apply to PWE propaganda per se, but to seep into private life, becoming normalized through its re-enactment in the office. Delmer recalls how members of his team were endlessly playing pranks on each other which 'took the form of

[17] Lorna Sage, 'The Prime of Muriel Spark', *The Observer*, 30th May 1976, p. 11.
[18] Hamilton, p. 10.
[19] Whittaker, p. 110.
[20] For a classic text on the impersonal style of modernism, see T.S. Eliot, 'Tradition and the Individual Talent', *Perspecta*, 19 (1982 [1919]), 36-42.
[21] Glover, p. 353.

forgeries in the best “black” manner’, such as ‘a Foreign Office letter warning [Max Braun, a PWE intelligence expert] that an attempt was to be made on his life’ (*BB*, 151). How can the often-proclaimed British values of freedom and democracy be reconciled with the morally ambivalent methods of black propaganda?

2. The Pedagogic Potential of Democratic Propaganda

Crossman’s 1952 address to the Royal United Service Institution (RUSI) constitutes an attempt to answer such question. Contrary to the traditional distinction between propaganda and education – ‘propaganda *tells* people *what* to think whereas education *teaches* people *how* to think’[22] – Crossman argued that successful propaganda exhibits a commitment to education:

> The job of propaganda is [...] to stimulate in people of the country thought for themselves, to make them begin to be, not cogs in a machine or units of a collective organization, but individuals. Individualism is the first act of disloyalty to a totalitarian government, and every individual who begins to feel he has a right to have a view is already committing an act of disloyalty...[23]

Reflecting on his Second World War experience, Crossman suggested that totalitarian propaganda and democratic propaganda have divergent aims. While the former attempts to indoctrinate citizens into an existing set of beliefs, the latter intends to seep through the cracks of such discourse in order to cultivate doubt. Therefore, Crossman argues, somewhat controversially, that democratic propaganda such as PWE propaganda can act as a pedagogic tool to foster critical thinking among citizens of totalitarian regimes in the expectation that it may lead them to suspect, and ultimately challenge, their governments.[24]

Spark’s *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie*, a novel deeply concerned with the nature of education, illustrates Crossman’s claim. Although set in the interwar period, this is a post-war novel which is primarily concerned with exploring how fascism operates in the microcosm of the Marcia Blaine School for Girls. Miss Brodie is an unorthodox schoolteacher who uses aestheticism to manipulate her favourite students – the Brodie set – into imposing her (often unethical) fictional ideas into reality. Miss Brodie claims to understand ‘education’ as ‘a leading out of what is already there in the pupil’s soul’ instead of ‘a putting in of something that is not

[22] Philip M. Taylor, *Munitions of the Mind: A History of Propaganda from the Ancient World to the Present Day* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2003), p. 14.

[23] Richard Crossman, ‘The Creed of a Modern Propagandist’, in *A Psychological Warfare Casebook*, ed. by William Daugherty (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1958), pp. 35-47 (p. 40).

[24] PWE propaganda certainly sought to disrupt Nazi propaganda, but it could be argued that it also inculcated a different, and not necessarily more truthful, set of beliefs. Although I overall agree with Crossman’s line of argument, I believe he is trying to simplify this complex issue as a means to defend Britain’s use of black propaganda during the Second World War.

there' – what she accuses her educational nemesis, headmistress Miss Mackay, of doing (*PMJB*, 34). However, in practice, she uses her own imagination rather than empirical experience to build a worldview that she expects her students to unquestioningly accept. For example, she believes that she can foresee her students' skills and describes the school as an 'education factory', which points to her desire to mass produce young minds moulded by herself (*PMJB*, 113). In fact, Miss Brodie, an admirer of Mussolini and Hitler, is presented as an embodiment of fascism insofar as she believes herself to be always right and unaccountable to moral law. As a result, Miss Brodie's pedagogy, not dissimilar from totalitarian propaganda, seeks to indoctrinate her students into her own set of beliefs and discourage the exercise of critical thinking because it shows potential to jeopardize her influence.

Through the figure of school pupil Sandy Stranger, Spark allows the reader to partake in the structural movement from unwavering loyalty to outright suspicion of Miss Brodie. Sandy's initial belief that Miss Brodie's behaviour was 'outside the context of right and wrong' is questioned by her unapologetic encouragement of her student Joyce Emily Hammond to fight for Franco during the Spanish Civil and her student Eunice Gardiner to 'become at least a pioneer missionary in some deadly and dangerous zone of the earth' (*PMJB*, 61). In addition, Miss Brodie insists on involving Rose Stanley, another student described as being 'famous for sex', as a proxy for herself in an affair with the art master (*PMJB*, 3, 85). Such behaviour demonstrates Miss Brodie's prioritisation of her own beliefs and desires at the expense of the pastoral care she owes her students. However, Miss Brodie's imposition of her imaginary fantasies onto the girls backfires when Sandy takes Rose's place in the affair, thus prompting Sandy to recognize Miss Brodie's fallibility and to challenge her previously taken-for-granted role as 'the God of Calvin [who] sees the beginning and the end' (*PMJB*, 121). In fact, it emerges that Rose 'was the least […] excited by Miss Brodie's love affairs, or by anyone else', having no interest in sex whatsoever (*PMJB*, 53).

Sandy's frightening encounter with a queue of men waiting for their unemployment benefits – imaginatively rendered as 'one dragon's body which had no right to be in the city and yet would not go away and was unslayable' – constitutes an inescapable example of 1930s economic deprivation which also serves to confront Miss Brodie's heroic mythmaking (*PMJB*, 38). Miss Brodie shows a judgemental attitude towards 'the Unemployed', which she depicts as passive figures one should pray for because they are incapable of helping themselves, being prone to 'spend their dole on drink before they go home' and let 'their children starve' (*PMJB*, 37). By the end of the novel, however, Sandy understands that Miss Brodie's culturally vibrant Edinburgh is only a fragment of the real Edinburgh: a myopic middle-class construction oblivious to the poverty and suffering of the working classes. Reacting against Miss Brodie's idealism, Sandy claims that 'it did not seem necessary that the world should be saved, only that the poor people in the streets and slums of Edinburgh should be relieved' (*PMJB*, 123).

Sandy's realization that Miss Brodie's imaginary rather than empirical worldview is far from flawless encourages her to defy her teacher for inculcating the supremacy of aesthetic idealism above moral responsibility in her students. As the author, Spark herself enables such realization because, acting like a PWE black propagandist, she introduces disruptive events such as Sandy's unforeseen affair with the art master and distressing encounter with poverty, both of which serve the purpose of cracking Miss Brodie's seemingly predetermined, and grandiose, mythmaking. In doing so, Sandy ultimately becomes the refusenik totalitarian citizen who, interpellated by Spark's introduction of facts which are inconsistent with Miss Brodie's dictatorial discourse, is led to suspect, and ultimately betray, her country – embodied in the figure of Miss Brodie herself – for fascist indoctrination. Therefore, Spark's fictional method resembles that of PWE black propaganda insofar as it carves out room for dissent, which can act as a catalyst for critical thinking, particularly at times of socio-political upheavals.

Sandy eventually escapes the authoritarian influence of Miss Brodie and prompts her teacher's dismissal from the school, but as is the case with Paul in *The Hothouse by the East River*, whether her betrayal stems from moral duty or personal self-interest remains unclear. Sandy later embraces Catholicism, a religion 'in whose ranks she had found quite a number of Fascists much less agreeable than Miss Brodie' and becomes Sister Helena of the Transfiguration (*PMJB*, 126). At this stage, Sandy shows an apologetic attitude towards Miss Brodie, whom she describes as 'quite an innocent in her way' – the product, to a certain extent, of the economic depression of the 1930s, which closed doors to single women – and her own representation as 'clutching the bars of the grille' insinuates a certain degree of regret about her less than altruistic treatment of Miss Brodie (*PMJB*, 128). Sandy is certainly not a blameless victim in Miss Brodie's plots; indeed, as Gerard Carruthers notes, her motivations can often be seen as 'competitive, probably jealous, certainly in her behaviour with Lloyd, immoral'.[25] By the end of the novel, it is not clear whether Sandy betrayed Miss Brodie out of moral responsibility, envy, or both. Perhaps, as was the case with the German troops acting on guidance from PWE propaganda, Sandy is simply given a moral justification to act in a self-interested manner. Be that as it may, by exposing the unethical behaviour lurking beneath the surface of a seemingly lively and charismatic teacher, *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie* illustrates Spark's historically contingent advocacy of an ethics of deception.

[25] Gerard Carruthers, 'Muriel Spark as Catholic Novelist', in *The Edinburgh Companion to Muriel Spark*, ed. by Michael Gardiner and Willy Maley (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2010), pp. 74-84 (p. 78).

3. Black Propaganda in States of Exception

In *Man and the State*, Catholic philosopher Jacques Maritain, an important influence on Spark's metaphysics, explores the morality of means and ends in relation to the state.[26] He claims that 'applying intrinsically evil means to attain an intrinsically good end is simply nonsense and a blunder', even though he acknowledges that this is a contentious political belief.[27] In his view, there are two ways of understanding the rationalization of politics: the technical rationalization and the moral rationalization. The technical rationalization advocates the Machiavellian practice of 'conquering and keeping power by any means whatsoever […] on the sole condition that they be fit to ensure success' and gives prominence to immediate success; this approach is characteristic of totalitarian states.[28] On the other hand, the moral rationalization is based on the values of freedom and virtue and prioritises long-term state welfare; this approach is characteristic of democratic states.[29] While Maritain firmly believes that democratic states must behave morally, he notes that exceptional circumstances may require the temporary suspension of certain ethical norms:

> In utterly barbarised societies like a concentration camp, or even in quite particular conditions like those of clandestine resistance in an occupied country, many things which were, as to their moral nature, objectively fraud or murder or perfidy in ordinary civilized life cease, now, to come under the same definition and become, as to their moral nature, objectively permissible or ethical things.[30]

While the distinction between moral and immoral actions is by no means shattered, 'the line of demarcation has shifted' and reason becomes the only decision-making tool in exceptional political circumstances.[31]

Maritain is here anticipating Agamben's juridical concept of 'state of exception' which can be defined as the temporary suspension of the juridical order during a period of state emergency or crisis, characterised by 'the provisional abolition of the distinction among legislative, executive, and judicial powers' and their replacement by an all-powerful executive power.[32] Although the purpose of a state of exception is the safeguarding of constitutional law through its provisional suppression, Agamben calls attention to its frequent seizure by totalitarian states in their attempts to turn facts into laws. Nazism was in fact a state of exception which

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[26] For a discussion of the influence of Jacques Maritain on Muriel Spark, see Waugh, 'Muriel Spark and the Metaphysics of Modernity', pp. 63-93.
[27] Jacques Maritain, *Man and the State* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1956), p. 55.
[28] Maritain, pp. 56-8.
[29] Maritain, pp. 58-64.
[30] Maritain, p. 73.
[31] Maritain, p. 73.
[32] Giorgio Agamben, *State of Exception* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005), pp. 3-7.

allowed ‘the physical elimination not only of political adversaries but of entire categories of citizens who for some reason [could not] be integrated into the political system’.[33]

However, states of exception are by no means confined to authoritarian regimes. In fact, the very creation and operation of the PWE can be framed within a ‘state of exception’ originating from the democratic *necessity* to defeat National Socialism by using *any available means* such as the production of morally ambivalent black propaganda to attack enemy morale. Necessity is here evaluated from an extra-juridical dimension, in this case political, which overlooks the juridical order (the democratic values inscribed in law) in order to achieve its long-term preservation. Yet Agamben warns that states of exception are often turned into ‘a technique of government’ and therefore the concept is located at the ‘threshold of indeterminacy between democracy and absolutism’.[34] Black propaganda has indeed become a technique of government because it did not simply disappear after WWII; instead, it was adopted by the Information Research Department (IRD), ‘a secret organisation, founded at the beginning of the Cold War to gather confidential information about Communism and produce factually based anti-Communist propaganda […] for dissemination both abroad and at home’.[35] As Paul Lashmar and James Oliver note, ‘[m]any of the techniques used by IRD were inherited from the PWE/SOE, as were a number of the first recruits’, including Ralph Murray, the first Director of the IRD.[36]

In *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie*, Sandy’s betrayal of Miss Brodie can be seen as a (democratic) state of exception insofar as it mirrors the PWE aim of defeating fascism through individual judgement, even if partly tainted by self-interest. As we have seen, Miss Brodie is described as a fascist admirer who commends Mussolini for having solved ‘the unemployment problem’ and Hitler for being ‘a prophet-figure like Thomas Carlyle, and more reliable than Mussolini’ (*PMJB*, 98). Within the Marcia Blaine School for Girls, Miss Brodie similarly erects herself as a charismatic leader and brings her selected girls together as ‘Miss Brodie’s fascisti [...] all knit together for her need and [...] marching along’ (*PMJB*, 29). Such spatial configuration is maintained at the expense of Mary Macgregor, the scapegoat who secures Sandy’s sense of

[33] Agamben, p. 2.
[34] Agamben, pp. 2-3.
[35] Hugh Wilford, ‘The Information Research Department: Britain's Secret Cold War Weapon Revealed’, *Review of International Studies*, 24 (1998), 353-69 (p. 353).
[36] Paul Lashmar and James Oliver, *Britain’s Secret Propaganda War 1948-1977* (Stroud: Sutton Publishing, 1998), p. 31. However, the IRD was not merely a recreation of the PWE, but ‘very much a Foreign Office creature’ interested in ‘strengthening anti-Communist forces in Western Europe rather than psychological warfare activities designed to roll back Communist regimes in Eastern Europe.’ See Lowell H. Schwartz, *Political Warfare against the Kremlin: US and British Propaganda Policy at the Beginning of the Cold War* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), pp. 47-8.

belonging to the group. Sandy worries that a potential failure to resist her own desire to be nice to Mary Macgregor would make her 'separate herself [from the group], and be lonely, and blameable' (*PMJB*, 28).

Miss Brodie's educational approach confirms Sandy's view of the Brodie set as fascisti, for the girls soon learn that objectivity must be based on her teacher's preference, which obliterates alternative views: 'Who is the greatest Italian painter?' 'Leonardo da Vinci, Miss Brodie.' 'That is incorrect. The answer is Giotto, he is my favourite' (*PMJB*, 7). However, when Miss Brodie foretells that Rose will sleep with the arts master as a proxy for herself, Sandy realises that 'this was not theory; Miss Brodie meant it' (*PMJB*, 120). Sandy's eventual disloyalty towards Miss Brodie does not stem from interest in 'the state of world affairs', as Miss Mackay suspects, but rather from a desire to prevent Miss Brodie's ethical disregard for the harmful consequences of viewing the world through the lens of her imagination (*PMJB*, 125). Ironically, Miss Mackay, who had previously highlighted the importance of prioritising institutional over personal loyalties, regards Sandy's betrayal of Miss Brodie as 'rather unpleasant' (*PMJB*, 125). In this context, Sandy's staging of a (democratic) state of exception in her betrayal of Miss Brodie, which echoes Crossman's aforementioned claim concerning the significance of individualism as 'the first act of disloyalty', demonstrates that neither group nor individual loyalties can ever hold unconditionally.[37]

Conversely, Spark's *The Mandelbaum Gate* explores Adolf Eichmann's betrayal of German Jews as an (authoritarian) state of exception, based on a refusal to question the moral authority of a state nationalism which has obliterated human dignity and care. The novel follows Barbara Vaughan, a half Jewish Catholic woman not unlike Spark herself, on her pilgrimage to the Holy Land. Ignoring warnings not to cross the Mandelbaum Gate into Jordan for religious reasons, she decides to do so disguised as a Muslim woman in order to continue visiting Christian shrines and join her lover, the divorced archaeologist Harry Clegg, whom she intends to marry providing that his marriage annulment is forthcoming. When her cousin Michael, a consultant on the Eichmann trial, offers her a public ticket to attend a session, Barbara accepts reluctantly because she regards the trial as 'something apart from her purpose; it was political and temporary', seemingly detachable from the timelessness of the Jewish faith (*MG*, 213).

Yet the Eichmann trial – the first Holocaust trial to take place in Jerusalem, to feature survivors' oral testimonies and to be widely televised – becomes central to the novel. In fact, it strongly influences Barbara's decision to continue her pilgrimage into Jordan and to marry Harry

[37] Crossman, 'The Creed of a Modern Propagandist', p. 40.

Clegg – with or without the Catholic Church's blessing – in rebellion against thoughtless commitment to political and religious ideologies. Having witnessed Eichmann's interrogation, it became evident to Barbara that '[t]he man was plainly not testifying for himself, but for his prewritten destiny. He was not answering for himself or his own life at all, but for an imperative deity named Bureau IV-V-4, of whom he was the High Priest' (*MB*, 218). According to Eichmann, 'no man is justified in circumventing an order' because, lacking moral imagination, he is unable to envision any scenario where disobedience may be legitimate, or even morally imperative.[38] Eichmann's dull discourse, devoid of any individual judgement, is therefore experienced by Barbara as 'a conspiracy to prevent her brain from functioning' (*MB*, 217). By criticising Eichmann's failure to question inhumane government directives, Spark embraces what Lyndsey Stonebridge has described as a common secular response to the trial: 'the importance of individual judgement over the tyranny of thoughtless obedience'.[39] Eichmann's (authoritarian) state of exception in his betrayal of German Jews is thus the result of his inability to interrogate his own national allegiance to a state which demands nothing less than a crime against humanity.

4. Encountering Foreign Nationals

In the summer of 1961, Spark spent five days attending the Eichmann trial for the *Observer* and returned to Britain 'terribly depressed, sleeping a lot, crying, unable to locate the reason for this'.[40] Unable to write her report for the *Observer*, she set out to explore her experience through fiction in *The Mandelbaum Gate*. Spark's contemporary, the political philosopher Hannah Arendt, who also attended Eichmann's trial and wrote the report which carried the coined phrase 'banality of evil' for the *New Yorker*, sparked controversy when arguing that Eichmann's evasion of responsibility was just as evil as antisemitism. In her view, Eichmann's greatest flaw was his 'inability to *think*, namely, to think from the standpoint of somebody else'.[41] Eichmann's recurrent use of bureaucratic language, consisting mainly of clichés, had 'the socially recognized function of protecting us against reality, that is, against the claim on our thinking attention which all events and facts arouse by virtue of their existence', and as a result, facilitated the mechanical nature of his actions and the dehumanization of his victims.[42] Arendt describes thinking as a conversation

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[38] Jochen von Lang and Claus Sibyll, *Eichmann Interrogated: Transcripts from the Archives of the Israeli Police*, trans. by Ralph Manheim (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1983), pp. 198-9.
[39] Stonebridge, p. 83.
[40] Stannard, *Muriel Spark*, p. 245.
[41] Hannah Arendt, *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil* (London: Penguin, 2006), p. 49.
[42] Hannah Arendt, 'Thinking and Moral Considerations: A Lecture', *Social Research*, 38 (1971), 417-46 (p. 418).

with oneself – a 'two-in-one' – by which consciousness is actualized; it is 'dialectical and critical because it goes through this questioning and answering process' and does not seek truth but 'agreement, to be consistent with oneself'.[43] Eichmann's failure to interrogate Nazi social rules led to blind obedience because his consciousness was engaged in monologue rather than dialogue. Depicted as a self-centred individual solely concerned about climbing up the ladder, Eichmann's selective memory tended to foreground his career progression at the expense of the Holocaust and other significant historical events. In doing so, he exhibited a failure of "attention", an inability to understand what others are going through.

Such ethical orientation is theorised by French intellectual Simone Weil in *Waiting for God*:

> Attention consists of suspending our thought, leaving it detached, empty, and ready to be penetrated by the object; it means holding in our minds, within the reach of this thought, but on the lower level and not in contact with it, the diverse knowledge we have acquired which we are forced to make use of.[44]

According to Weil, attention requires the erasure of the ego's limited and selfish perspective – a renunciation of the 'I' – in order to enable an ethics of intersubjectivity. Attending to the Other demands 'a recognition that the sufferer exists, not only as a unit in a collection, or a specimen from the social category labelled "unfortunate," but as a man, exactly like us'.[45] Such a view resonates with Crossman's advocacy of democratic propaganda as a pedagogic tool to address Germans as thinking individuals and confirms the difficulties in attending to foreign nationals as a collective. Similarly, Spark's fiction embraces a situational ethics that prioritises critical thinking – Arendt's 'two-in-one' – as the best guarantee of exercising our moral and political responsibilities towards others. Such responsibilities, however, should not be based on universality, but on difference: the recognition that the Other's radical alterity cannot be apprehended through the self's frame of reference.[46] In *The Hothouse by the East River* and *A Far Cry from Kensington*, Spark exposes the enduring consequences of failing to attend to otherness, embodied in the figures of a POW and a post-war refugee, respectively.

At the beginning of *The Hothouse by the East River*, Paul attempts to convince Elsa that Kiel deliberately intended to be sent back to the prison camp 'for bad conduct' while giving the impression that 'he just lost control and broke out into violence' (*HER*, 18-9). However, Elsa

[43] Hannah Arendt, 'The Two-in-One', in *The Life of the Mind* (New York: Harcourt, 1978), pp. 179-93 (pp. 185-6).
[44] Simone Weil, *Waiting for God* (New York: HarperPerennial, 1973), pp. 111-2.
[45] Weil, p. 115.
[46] I am drawing on Emmanuel Levinas' 'ethics of alterity'. See *Totality and Infinity: An Essay on Exteriority* (Pittsburgh, PA: Duquesne University Press, 1969).

sympathetically believes that he may well have lost control because 'it must be nerve-racking for them [to know] they've ratted on their own country' (*HER*, 19). Elsa is attuned to the conflicted sense of national loyalty experienced by POW collaborators, even though she treats Kiel as an equal and in fact recognises that 'one does forget sometimes that these German collaborators are still prisoners' (*HER*, 19). In contrast, the novel suggests that Paul recurrently misreads Kiel because the POW's inalienable otherness prevents him from grasping what he is going through. Paul in fact demonises Kiel as 'a very dangerous, wild personality' and concludes that he must be 'a double agent' (*HER*, 46). Such malignant characterisation influences Paul's post-war belief that the POW must have forged official documents to feign death and gain the freedom to 'get [his] revenge' on him (*HER*, 47). Paul's paranoia stems from his prejudiced wartime treatment of Kiel during the Second World War; after all, he indirectly caused Kiel's death because, by reporting him as a spy without evidence, he brought about his return to the prison camp, where he was eventually shot while trying to escape. Paul's dishonest behaviour towards Kiel is at the root of his fearfulness of Kiel's ghost, who persistently haunts his purgatorial existence in post-war New York. By the end of the novel, Paul and Elsa eventually acknowledge the reality of their deaths and the need to return to the past alongside Kiel and their fellow ex-propagandist ghosts.

In *A Far Cry from Kensington*, Spark renders even more emphatically the dire consequences of failing to hear and respond to the ethical call of radical alterity, embodied in the figure of the post-war refugee. The novel follows Mrs. Hawkins' publishing career and her social interactions in post-war London. Its 'far cry' belongs to Polish dressmaker Wanda, who is being blackmailed by unimaginative writer Hector Bartlett for 'not declaring [her] income to the Authorities' and eventually commits suicide after Mrs. Hawkins fails to alleviate her anxieties concerning the workings of state bureaucracy and the prospect of imprisonment and deportation. Although Mrs. Hawkins often appears to suffer from 'unmitigated communion', characterised by 'placing others' needs before one's own, worrying excessively about others' problems, and helping others to one's own detriment', she proves unable to read Wanda's vulnerability and suffering.[47]

Confronted with Wanda's foreignness, Mrs. Hawkins becomes paralysed by fear and suspicion of aliens, unconsciously adopting the common mid-century belief that 'only a loyalty to [their] old countries is understandable'.[48] In particular, the fact that Wanda is Polish seems

[47] Vicki S. Helgeson and Heidi L. Fritz, 'Unmitigated Agency and Unmitigated Communion: Distinctions from Agency and Communion', *Journal of Research in Personality*, 33 (1999), 131-58 (p. 132).
[48] Hannah Arendt, 'We Refugees', in *The Jewish Writings*, ed. by Jerome Kohn and Ron H. Feldman (New York: Schocken Books, 2007), pp. 264-74 (p. 272).

significant, given that Poland was a wartime ally which was then abandoned by Britain to post-war Soviet domination. In a similar vein, Mrs. Hawkins disregards the refugee, failing to answer her 'far cry' for help:

> I had no sooner put down the phone than Wanda came down the stairs. 'Who was that, Mrs Hawkins?'
>
> 'A friend of mine.' I think my voice was harsh. Certainly I was afraid of psychic contagion.
>
> [...]
>
> 'You spoke to Father Stanislas. I heard you.'
>
> My fear was irrational but strong. I must have appeared guilty; probably I backed away from her.
>
> 'No, Wanda. You need to see a doctor.'
>
> 'What! You have talked to my enemies that say I am mad. You plot. All in this house are plotting to take me away to a doctor.'
>
> 'Why don't you see Father Stanislas first?'
>
> She ran upstairs to her room, wailing (*FCK*, 122-3).

In this last conversation before Wanda's suicide, Mrs. Hawkins displays a sense of psychological and physical revulsion at the sight of Wanda's evident distress. She is incapable of apprehending Wanda's burden, which is perceived as too overwhelming, and attempts to unload it on spiritual and/or medical authorities. Devoid of the capacity to 'unself' herself in order to care about Wanda, Mrs. Hawkins merely shows concern about the impact of Wanda's apparent derangement on her friend and landlady Milly: 'I'd like to make some arrangement for Wanda before Milly comes back' (*FCK*, 123). This is followed by a self-absorbed conversation with her boyfriend about getting a flat, which most likely takes place while Wanda is drowning herself.

By exposing Wanda's police verdict as 'suicide while of unsound mind' (*FCK*, 134), Spark offers a critique of the automatic link between madness and suicide, which neglects the extent to which a low socio-economic background and the absence or indifference of social support structures may lead to fatal consequences. During her time at the PWE, Spark had in fact been privy to the anxieties of her POW walking companions: Hans 'was subject to deep depressions' and worried about German parachutists landing in Britain, and Kurt contemplated suicide in response to potential 'reprisals at home' if his collaboration with Britain was to be disclosed (*CV*, 156-7).

Iris Murdoch's background was similar to Spark's insofar as they both had first-hand experience of working with foreign nationals in times of conflict. From 1944 to 1946, Murdoch had been employed as a relief worker in Austria and Belgium with the United Nations Relief and

Rehabilitation Administration (UNRRA), an administrative body created in 1943 'to provide economic assistance to European nations after World War II and to repatriate and assist the refugees who would come under Allied control.[49] In this role, she was in contact

> with displaced persons, lots of Yugoslavs and Poles, every sort of person who had to be identified and looked after. A number of them, particularly Yugoslavs, didn't want to go back to their homeland [which was dictatorially ruled by Tito]. It was absolutely front-line stuff, and much of the time one was simply preoccupied with feeding people.[50]

Such an experience, much like Spark's own work with POWs during her time at the PWE, complicated Murdoch's understanding of national loyalty and sharpened her awareness of the vulnerability of stateless people. Indeed, Murdoch's witnessing of what she described as 'the utter breakdown of society' engendering mass displacement at the mid-century would elicit 'a strong feeling about refugees', who are central to many of her novels, including *The Flight from the Enchanter* (1956), *The Italian Girl* (1964), *The Nice and the Good* (1968) and *Nuns and Soldiers* (1980).[51] A comparison between Spark's *A Far Cry from Kensington* and Murdoch's *The Flight from the Enchanter* is instructive insofar as it reveals a shared understanding of the pitfalls of embracing an ethics based on national allegiance.

In *The Flight from the Enchanter*, the enigmatic Mischa Fox is a powerful enchanter who controls the destinies of those around him, including factory worker Rosa, the SELIB-employed bureaucrat John Rainborough, and the refugees Nina and the Lusiewicz brothers. Nina, like Wanda, is an Eastern European dressmaker who has had the misfortune of being born east of the 'Farthest Point East', the arbitrary line running 'through Europe from north to south' that determines whether refugees are legally entitled to settle in Britain.[52] When a question posed by an obscure MP – influenced by Mischa Fox at the request of Rosa, who wishes to get rid of the abusive Lusciewicz brothers – elicits closer scrutiny of Eastern European refugees, Nina starts planning a relocation to Australia. Afraid of the authorities and fearing that her refugee status will

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[49] United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. 'United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration', in *Holocaust Encyclopedia* <https://encyclopedia.ushmm.org/content/en/article/united-nations-relief-and-rehabilitation-administration> [accessed 10 August 2022].

[50] John Haffenden, 'John Haffenden Talks to Iris Murdoch', in *From a Tiny Corner in the House of Fiction: Conversations with Iris Murdoch*, ed. by Gillian Dooley (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 2003), pp. 124-38 (p. 130).

[51] Haffenden, p. 130; Jeffrey Meyers, 'Two Interviews with Iris Murdoch, 1990 & 1991', in *From a Tiny Corner in the House of Fiction: Conversations with Iris Murdoch*, ed. by Gillian Dooley (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 2003), pp. 218-34 (p. 231).

[52] Murdoch, p. 98.

close her doors, she decides to approach Rosa in the hope that she might be willing to act as 'a confidant and accomplice […] who could advise her, make inquiries for her, and if necessary, provide her with a reference'.[53]

Similarly to Wanda, Nina recurrently attempts to ask Rosa for help, but Rosa fails to see the dressmaker as anything other than an object in the background of her daily preoccupations, as testified by the self-absorbed nature of Rosa's last conversation with Nina:

> 'Miss Keepe, said Nina, [...] might I speak to you? Have you a moment?'
>
> I'm going somewhere just now, said Rosa, but do walk along with me if you like.'
>
> […]
>
> Without thinking what she was doing, she began to run. Nina ran behind her.
>
> 'I'm so sorry', said Rosa, 'I just forgot for a moment.'
>
> […]
>
> 'How are you getting on, Nina?' asked Rosa, when they were on the other side.
>
> […]
>
> 'I have some problems,' said Nina.
>
> 'Life is a series of problems!' said Rosa merrily.
>
> […]
>
> 'How are you getting on, Nina?' asked Rosa. 'Oh yes, I asked you that, didn't I. I do hope these problems aren't really bad ones. If ever I can be of any assistance -'
>
> 'Ah, yes!' said Nina breathlessly from behind Rosa's elbow. 'I would like to ask your advice!'
>
> 'Never be afraid to ask advice,' said Rosa. 'People try to be far too independent of each other. I'm just going in now to ask Mr Fox's advice.'
>
> 'Mr Fox - ?' said Nina. […] Some other time – ' said Nina, 'I'll call again.' She turned about and bolted away down the street.
>
> Rosa looked after her in surprise. Then she turned and looked at the door of the house. She forgot Nina completely.[54]

Rosa keeps forgetting Nina's presence, trivializes Nina's problems, neglects Nina's response – asking her the same question again – and insincerely offers advice which is endlessly deferred and never ultimately provided. Furthermore, when Rosa's acquaintances call in to see her, Nina – her first visitor – is constantly overlooked and dispatched with polite apologies: '"Good

[53] Murdoch, p. 145.
[54] Murdoch, p. 236-9.

heavens!' said Rosa, 'I'm so sorry! I'm afraid I'd forgotten all about you. How dreadful of me. It's been rather a difficult morning. I'm very sorry"'.[55] Although Rosa has plenty of time for her protégée Annette and Mischa Fox, these quotations demonstrate that she has none left for Nina, who is frantically worried about the prospect of statelessness.

When she receives 'a communication from the Home Office asking her to present herself at a certain department in Westminster, and adding that failure to do so would render her liable to prosecution', Nina, much like Wanda, believes she is likely to be subjected to the worst possible outcome – deportation –, for she 'was without identity in a world where to be without identity is the first and most universal of crimes'.[56] To avoid such an outcome, Nina also flees towards death, crossing 'the frontier where no papers are asked for, […] which remains, for the persecuted, always open'.[57] After Nina commits suicide by jumping out of a window, Rosa complains that Nina has been 'foolish', and, unlike Mrs. Hawkins, who remains haunted by the memory of her complicity in Wanda's death, refuses to accept any responsibility for her actions; however, Mischa Fox's assistant draws attention to Rosa's neglect of Nina, noting that '[s]omeone ought to have explained things to her, someone who knew her situation through and through' and labelling the refugee as an 'incidental casualty'.[58] Yet as Arendt notes, suicide – 'a quiet and modest way of vanishing' – was not at all uncommon among Second World War refugees entering a new culture which still considered them '"technically enemy aliens" and prevented them from creating lives of their own.[59]

5. Spark's Unsentimental Mode

Following the disclosure of the hitherto unknown horrors of the Second World War and the Holocaust, mid-century women writers such as Simone Weil, Hannah Arendt and Diane Arbus made the conscious choice to reject the anaesthetics of emotion in favour of toughness, which they viewed as a more effective means to encourage readers to face challenging facts and move to action.[60] I suggest that Spark's unsentimental mode can be framed as part of this stylistic and philosophical current, theorised by Deborah Nelson in *Tough Enough* (2017). Literary scholars have consistently attributed Spark's unsentimentality to the Catholic anti-humanistic tradition, embraced by authors such as Evelyn Waugh, which presents the novelist as a God-like figure

[55] Murdoch, p. 153.
[56] Murdoch, p. 263-4.
[57] Murdoch, p. 265.
[58] Murdoch, p. 279.
[59] Arendt, 'We Refugees', pp. 266-8.
[60] Deborah Nelson, *Tough Enough: Arbus, Arendt, Didion, McCarthy, Sontag, Weil* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2017), p. 8.

manipulating its characters – a technique which would become central to postmodernism. Malcolm Bradbury, for example, describes Spark as one of 'the Catholic novelists of detachment', Frank Kermode notes her 'remoteness, a lack of ordinary compassion, in her dealings with characters', and Ruth Whittaker suggests that her 'apparent callousness' renders her incapable of 'convey[ing] the force of emotions.[61] In contrast to these critics, I argue that Spark's unsentimental mode, much like that of the mid-century women writers discussed by Nelson, has been honed through her political experience. Spark's work for the PWE required acquiring intimate knowledge of the mind of the enemy while resisting identification and feelings of empathy in the process. In her subsequent career as a novelist, Spark similarly refuses to enable facile emotional identification with her characters, often preventing the reader from fully understanding their motives. In this section, I contend that Spark's unsentimental mode does not stem from callousness or lack of compassion, but from a desire to encourage individual critical thinking over crowd emotion in order to address social realities more concretely and directly.

Spark's unsentimental mode can also be traced to her Scottish education, which encouraged pupils 'not to be sentimental. Self-pity was something to be avoided. Don't drool over yourself and all that'.[62] At this time, she also became fascinated by the Scottish Border ballads, cold-blooded, tragic and uncanny oral stories blending realism with supernatural elements, which would strongly influence her subsequent literary work. To Spark, the Scottish Border ballads are '[a] model of controlled emotions, non-sentimental, and yet full of emotions, full of pity, fear, revenge, love, passion. But there is not one sentimental line'.[63] Spark's challenging personal circumstances further consolidated her stoic attitude to life and fiction: her disastrous marriage to a mentally unstable husband, her painful separation from her only child (for which she was much blamed) and her betrayal by her ex-lover Derek Stanford, who stole and sold some of her letters, would have moved many to self-pity. Yet Spark's reaction mirrors that of the narrator of *The Girls of Slender Means* when referring to the urban destruction of London during the Second World War: 'There was absolutely no point in feeling depressed about [it], it would have been like feeling depressed about the Grand Canyon or some event of the earth outside everybody's scope' (*GSM*, 1). From Spark's pragmatic point of view, sentiment is futile unless aligned with action.

[61] Malcolm Bradbury, 'Muriel Spark's Fingernails', in *Critical Essays on Muriel Spark*, ed. by Joseph Hynes (New York: G.K. Hall, 1992), pp. 187-93 (p. 187); Frank Kermode, *Continuities* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2015 [1968]), p. 202; Whittaker, p. 14.
[62] Nicola Christie, '"I was a writer. Ideas came first"', *The Times*, 6th March 2004, p. 15.
[63] Christie, p. 15.

During the Second World War, Spark's involvement in propaganda at the PWE offered her a crucial insight on how emotion – in Delmer's words, 'the human and personal angles beloved of such popular newspapers as the *Daily Express*' – can be instrumentalised to manipulate an enemy population (*BB*, 160). PWE propagandists were tasked with reading the German mind to anticipate enemy behaviour and craft effective propaganda capable of damaging morale. Sefton Delmer's expert knowledge of the German language and culture – he was born in Germany and worked as Berlin correspondent for the *Daily Express*, a position in which he became acquainted with prominent Nazis (including Hitler) – made him particularly well-suited for this task (*BG*, 98-9). In fact, Ellic Howe remarked that 'Delmer had an unusual, indeed phenomenal capacity for "tuning in" to, or penetrating the German mind and its mental processes, almost as if he himself resembled an ultra-sophisticated radio receiving set' (*BG*, 19), a metaphor that evokes the telepathic potential of new sound technologies.[64] To provide training on how to access the mind of the enemy, the PWE drew on psychological expertise. Bruce Lockhart, Director General of the PWE, claimed to have 'an open mind about psychologists'; the PWE 'employed three, and one, at least, did useful work for [the] German section' (*CR*, 156). Lockhart is most likely referring to J. T. MacCurdy, a Canadian psychiatrist who advised the PWE on the application of social psychology to the practice of propaganda.[65]

In his report 'A Memorandum on Psychological Approach to Problems of Propaganda', MacCurdy defines propaganda as 'the inculcation or strengthening of beliefs' which lead to 'the acceptance as truth or reality of something not yet proved, or, of its very nature unprovable'.[66] Instead of appealing to reason, the black output of the PWE sought to arouse emotions already present in the individual and provide an opportunity for the rationalisation of behaviour, since people are more likely to accept conclusions based on pre-existing assumptions. To accomplish this task, however, PWE propagandists needed to reach an 'agreement as to what are the

[64] See Nicholas Royle, *Telepathy and Literature: Essays on the Reading Mind* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1990).
[65] In addition to writing 'A Memorandum on Psychological Approach to Problems of Propaganda', MacCurdy was also involved in the production of black printed matter. Delmer introduces MacCurdy as 'MB's own "witch doctor"' who recommended techniques for malingering – the successful feigning of illness to get away without working – to be included in a booklet for distribution by underground networks (*BB*, 130-1). Howe suggests that MacCurdy may also have been involved in the 'Plague Booklet', which suggested that contact with Russian troops or infected Russian rats could bring a Plague to Germany and acted as reinforcement to a rumour put out by *Gustav Siegfried Eins* (*BG*, 219). According to Lee Richards, MacCurdy was also involved in the 'Evacuation against Evacuation' campaign designed to cause diarrhoea to Germans in order to disrupt their administration. It was, however, never implemented due to the German surrender. See Lee Richards, *The Black Art: British Clandestine Psychological Warfare against the Third Reich* (Peacehaven, East Sussex: www.psywar.org, 2010), p. 139.
[66] FO 898/181, Propaganda and Policy Plans. 1939-1941.

peculiarities of German thinking which differentiate it from our own'.[67] Although the remote location of PWE subjects hindered direct access to their minds, psychologists could rely on POWs as sources of intelligence that would inform future PWE campaigns.[68] Spark's apprenticeship in the art of thinking like someone else would prove valuable for her subsequent career as a novelist, since the relationship between a propagandist and its subjects is not substantially different from that between a novelist and its readers. In fact, MacCurdy believed that novelists are particularly qualified to undertake PWE work:

> If propaganda for the enemy is to be conducted on psychological lines this implies a rare gift, that which enables one on demand to think like someone else, to reconstruct the thought processes which produce a given idea, attitude, or bit of behaviour. [...] The best novelists have it, but practice it in all probability intuitively rather than in a reasoned conscious way.[69]

Like propaganda, literature 'buys your assent in an almost clandestine way', and therefore constitutes 'an excellent instrument for a slow transformation of the mind'.[70] Unsurprisingly, Muriel Spark went on to become a novelist after her time in the PWE and others such as Graham Greene, Rose Macaulay or Freya Stark, to name but a few, were already published writers before joining intelligence agencies. MacCurdy also adds that individuals who stand between two cultures are best placed to access the 'foreign viewpoint', and therefore, '[t]he best propagandist must have something <u>deracine</u> about him. Refugees one thinks of at once as useful for this task', but there is a risk that they 'may really be enemy agents and they may be blinded with prejudice' – a remark that recalls the widespread distrust of refugees that Arendt criticises in 'We Refugees'.[71] In short, PWE propagandists sought full understanding of the 'foreign viewpoint' while resisting emotional attachment to their enemy subjects. Yet as Robert W. Mitchell suggests, empathy and detachment are not entirely opposed notions, for 'the same imaginative propensity which allows someone to take the perspective of the other also allows the person to imagine the other from a perspective which discounts the other's perspective'.[72] Knowledge of the mind of the enemy or the reader is therefore essential even if PWE propagandists and Spark consciously adopt an unsentimental mode characterised by detachment.

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[67] FO 898/181, Propaganda and Policy Plans. 1939-1941.
[68] According to Kirk Robert Graham, British Army psychiatrist Henry Dicks interviewed German POWs and reached the conclusion that Germans have a preference for factual information. This may have influenced, or at least, corroborated Delmer's investment in 'grey' propaganda, and particularly the publication of *Nachrichten für die Truppe*, a newspaper targeted to German soldiers. See Kirk Robert Graham, 'Germany on the Couch: Psychology and the Development of British Subversive Propaganda to Nazi Germany', *Journal of Contemporary History*, 54 (2019), 487-507 (pp. 504-5).
[69] FO 898/181, Propaganda and Policy Plans. 1939-1941.
[70] Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, *An Aesthetic Education in the Era of Globalization* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2013), p. 38.
[71] FO 898/181, Propaganda and Policy Plans. 1939-1941.
[72] Robert W. Mitchell, 'The Psychology of Human Deception', *Social Research*, 63 (1996), 819-61 (p. 832).

In her 1971 essay 'The Desegregation of Art', Spark theorises her rejection of sentiment in favour of 'the arts of satire and of ridicule' (DA, 28). She argues that sentimentality purges our emotions, provoking passivity rather than agency; the reader or audience 'feel that their moral responsibilities are sufficiently fulfilled by the emotions they have been induced to feel' (DA, 28). Therefore, Spark believes that

> …the art and literature of sentiment and emotion, however beautiful in itself, however stirring in its depiction of actuality, has to go. It cheats us into a sense of involvement with life and society, but in reality it is a segregated activity. In its place I advocate the arts of satire and of ridicule. And I see no other living art form for the future. Ridicule is the only honourable weapon we have left (DA, 28).

Spark's rejection of 'the arts and literature of sentiment and emotion' resonates with the Brechtian 'alienation effect', which seeks to prevent the audience 'from simply identifying itself with the characters in the play' so that their behaviour is evaluated 'on a conscious plane, instead of, as hitherto, in the audience's subconscious'.[73] For Spark, like the German playwright Bertolt Brecht, emotion is a burden clouding our judgement and preventing us from consciously engaging with art – a conclusion which is far from misguided. According to Paul Bloom, emotional empathy is unnecessary for moral judgements and prone to prejudice and injustice; for example, emotional empathy is subject to confirmation bias, as well as insensitive to statistical data and estimated costs and benefits.[74] Furthermore, as Lauren Berlant notes in her critique of sentimental liberalism, 'the ideology of true feeling cannot admit the nonuniversality of pain', so it tends to generalize individual experience and replace social change with 'a civic-minded but passive ideal of empathy'.[75] In Spark's own words, 'sentimentality excludes other and more profound emotions. And in the end it can be very false', as her PWE experience had amply demonstrated.[76] Spark was well aware that, whereas propaganda relies on emotion and sweeping generalisation, art seeks to foster critical thought. By adopting an unsentimental mode in her representations of scapegoating, group thinking, unpleasantness and victimhood, Spark's writing can be seen to resist the moral myopia and bigotry promoted by propaganda.

In *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie*, schoolgirl Mary Macgregor is presented by the omniscient narrator as the scapegoat of the Brodie set. She is unattractively described as 'lumpy, with merely two eyes, a nose and a mouth like a snowman' and, unlike the accomplished girls in the set, would become 'famous for being stupid and always to blame' (*PMJB*, 10). A thoroughly

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[73] Bertolt Brecht, 'Alienation Effects in Chinese Acting', in *Brecht on Theatre: The Development of an Aesthetic*, ed. by John Willett (London: Eyre Methuen, 1964), pp. 91-9 (p. 91).
[74] Paul Bloom, *Against Empathy: The Case for Rational Compassion* (London: Vintage, 2018), pp. 22-35.
[75] Lauren Berlant, 'Poor Eliza', *American Literature*, 70 (1998), 635-68 (p. 641).
[76] Christie, p. 15.

unsentimental flash-forward recounting Mary's forthcoming death in a hotel fire further confirms the futility of her life:

> Back and forth along the corridors ran Mary Macgregor, through the thickening smoke. She ran one way; then, turning, the other way; and at either end the blast furnace of the fire met her. She heard no screams, for the roar of the fire drowned the screams; she gave no scream, for the smoke was choking her. She ran into somebody on her third turn, stumbled and died (*PMJB*, 11-2).

Although it might appear that Mary has simply been unlucky in meeting such a gruesome death, a later passage suggests a sense of predetermination to that end. When a science class experiment backfires, Mary Macgregor 'ran in panic between the benches until she was caught and induced to calm down, and she was told not to be so stupid…' (*PMJB*, 76).

In presenting Mary as the worthless glue that binds the group together, Spark's narrator refuses to shield readers from cruelty. Instead, it adopts a common mid-century 'malign attitude towards characters who do not grasp their limitations, not to mention their insignificant fates' whilst refusing to pass judgement.[77] Although Spark's narrator viciously scorns Mary, Spark encourages readers not to be complicit with such behaviour. In fact, the unadulterated portrayal of Mary's plight serves to emphasise the moral flaw of Sandy Stranger, who 'for good fellowship's sake' resists 'her temptation to be nice to Mary Macgregor', for fear that, 'by this action she would separate herself, and be lonely and blameable…' (*PMJB*, 28). Sandy's behaviour is driven by anxiety to comply with the group thinking of the Brodie set, whose achievements must necessarily be set against Mary's incompetence. Sandy's inability to consider Mary as anything other than the scapegoat of the group leads her to further retreat into her imagination, which, similarly to that of Miss Brodie, is unrestrained by morality. On hearing Mary cry, 'Sandy was unable to cope and decided to stride on and be a married lady having an argument with her husband' (*PMJB*, 28). By offering a case study of how group thinking can cloud one's judgement, Spark posits the significance of individual thinking as a moral compass.

Spark was in fact sceptical of the bonds of feeling and group identification elicited by the social movements of her time, adopting instead a dispassionate and personal point of view. In addition to her critique of nationalism as a narrow-minded ideology that 'shuts too many doors, far more doors than it ever opens', Spark adopted a 'different-from Catholicism' in her dislike of 'those terrible bleeding hearts, the saints, the Pope, priests [and] the sermons' and believed that the women's liberation movement 'has defeated itself because more and more they tend to clump

[77] Hepburn, p. 162.

women together…'[78] Like Spark, Caroline Rose in *The Comforters* struggles to reconcile the communal identity of Catholicism with her own individuality. A recent convert to the Catholic faith, Caroline goes on a private retreat to St. Philumena's to recover from her neurosis. There she meets Mrs. Hogg, the Catering Warden, who exploits Catholic dogma as a means to suppress opposing views and justify her brazen intrusion into other people's lives. For example, when Caroline refuses to discuss her conversion, Mrs. Hogg complains: 'Why won't you talk about your conversion? Conversion's a wonderful thing. It's not *Catholic* not to talk about it' (*C*, 28). Indeed, Mrs. Hogg holds an absolutist view of Catholicism, which requires the rejection of individual preference and the compliance with arbitrary rules dictated by herself. For instance, she takes issue with a visitor's refusal to put milk in their tea: 'Suppose a hundred and thirty people wanted tea without milk [or] each wanted something different' (*C*, 29).

Spark thus condemns the solidarity principle adopted by Mrs. Hogg as inherently biased, neglecting the individual identities of those Catholics who are different from herself. When discussing the treatment of Catholics in England – a 'favourite theme' at St. Philumena – the community's fallacious views on the high levels of Catholic discrimination remain largely unchallenged and expressions of dissent are immediately disqualified as suspect. For example, when a young lawyer expresses his view that Catholics are not overall prejudiced because of their faith, a member of the community whispers that '[h]e's curing from alcohol, poor lad' before Caroline, who thinks the reported atrocities 'very quaint', decides to abandon the party (*C*, 35). Caroline's refusal to comply with the other pilgrims' views on Catholic discrimination proves her unconditional commitment to maintaining her own critical point of view. In fact, it becomes evident that her individual freedom within her faith can only be achieved through the extermination of Mrs. Hogg. When drowning in the river, Mrs. Hogg's hands 'clung to Caroline's throat until the last', but her death eventually liberates Caroline from the demands of Catholic doctrine, allowing her to reconcile her individuality with her faith (*C*, 212). In fact, Caroline shows strong disapproval of the uncritical acceptance of such demands, which she views as 'exorbitant [and] outrageous. […] They are dishonest; their teachers are talking in their sleep. [When they teach you to love your neighbour], do they know what they are saying?' (*C*, 36). For both Caroline Rose and her literary creator, no ideology can be unconditionally accepted.

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[78] McQuillan, '"The Same Informed Air"', p. 227; Frankel, p. 446; Lynn Barber, 'The Elusive Magician', *Independent on Sunday*, 23rd September 1990, p. 10. Like Doris Lessing, Spark was reluctant to label herself as a feminist because she felt that the women's liberation movement had become too all-encompassing. Nevertheless, she was an advocate of women's rights and gender equality.

Spark is committed to realism as a tool for documenting reality, but she is careful to detach her personal feelings from her writing. Her interest in artistically capturing every aspect of social life, however unsavoury, is central to her unsentimental mode. Writing is not supposed to evade reality or make it nice; instead, it should throw light on those aspects of ordinary life which remain hidden from view. Diane Arbus famously said: 'I really believe that there are things which nobody would see unless I photographed them'.[79] In a similar vein, Spark's fiction often contributes to rendering otherness visible, for example, by portraying the plight of the interwar unemployed in *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie* and post-war refugees in *A Far Cry from Kensington*. In *Loitering with Intent*, Fleur addresses the question of unpleasant representations in relation to her own novel *Warrender Chase*. When considering the fact that readers may be shocked by the morally perverse portrayal of her character Charlotte, Fleur remarks:

> I wasn't writing poetry and prose so that the reader would think me a nice person, but in order that my sets of words should convey ideas of truth and wonder, as indeed they did to myself as I was composing them. […] I treated the story of Warrender Chase with a light and heartless hand, as is my way when I have to give a perfectly serious account of things (*LI*, 58-9).

In Fleur's view, hurting readers' feelings can sometimes be part of a writer's moral obligation because it forces them to confront the difficult truths that they routinely choose to ignore. In contrast to Sir Quentin, Fleur's employer and the founder of the Autobiographical Society, who insists that the members' memoirs feature 'the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth', Fleur recognises that frankness can easily be manipulated (*LI*, 10). Her conviction that 'frankness is not a quality that favours art' highlights the fact that fiction, unrestrained by the need to make truth claims, can yield important insights into alternative social and political realities (*LI*, 77).

Spark is also wary of sentimental representations of victimhood. In 'The Desegregation of Art', she observes that the 'representations of the victim-oppressor complex' which characterise protest literature are not 'achieving [their] ends or illuminating our lives any more, and that a more effective technique can and should be cultivated' (DA, 28). Spark's *The Driver's Seat* can be seen as an experiment in resisting victimhood. The novel follows Lise, an office worker, as she plots her own death at the hands of a sex maniac. Lise has been working at the same accounting firm 'for sixteen years and some months', except for some 'months of illness' which appear to have been caused by mental stress due to overwork (*DS*, 3). Lise barely has time to pack for her holiday because she has got 'all this work to finish', but when her boss informs her that the work can wait until her return, she starts 'to laugh hysterically. She finished laughing and started crying all in a flood […] As she ran to the lavatory she shouted to the whole office

[79] Diane Arbus, *Diane Arbus: An Aperture Monograph*, ed. by Doon Arbus and Marvin Israel (New York: Aperture, 1972), p. 15.

[…] "Leave me alone! It doesn't matter. What does it matter?" (*DS*, 3). Lise's seemingly eccentric behaviour suggests that she has already planned never to return to her workplace, where she is evidently overworked and underpaid; indeed, this holiday is her 'first after three years' because '[t]here is so little money' (*DS*, 15). Moreover, the fact that she has 'five girls under her and two men', but 'two women and five men' over her appears to indicate that she has less opportunities for career development and promotion than her male counterparts (*DS*, 3). Lise lives alone in a minimalist one-bed flat where 'everything is contrived to fold away into the dignity of unvarnished pinewood' (*DS*, 7). The flat is kept 'clean-lined and clear […] as if it were uninhabited', which reflects both Lise's empty personal life and the disembodiment she strives for.

Lise's professional and personal circumstances certainly give her some reason to feel sorry for herself, yet she refuses to act as a victim – the passive receptacle of her colleagues' sympathy – and instead chooses to exercise her agency to find a solution to her problems. The novel acts as a parody of the love story, as Lise's frantic search for 'her type' does not refer to a romantic partner, but to a murderer. Patrick Parrinder's description of *The Driver's Seat* as 'a slap in the face to feminist and anti-rape campaigners' appears misguided given that Spark so evidently seeks to satirise the capitalist and patriarchal pressures that subject women to positions of victimhood.[80] In fact, the novel ridicules the rise of victimology during the 1970s, which sought to study the personal complicity of victims in their own subjugation.[81] In critique of the harmful legitimating logic of sexual assault by which women 'look for it', Spark creates a protagonist who chooses self-destructive action over pervasive female structural violence (*DS*, 87).[82] In a world where women are often categorised as either blameless or complicit victims, Lise rejects both roles in favour of maintaining her own agency. However, her eventual inability to meet her perfect death when her murderer rapes her, 'plung[ing] into her, with the knife poised high', shows that women's tragical self-immolation is hardly the path to freedom (*DS*, 89).

Spark's unsentimental representation of Lise's journey towards murder in fact seeks to elicit 'other more important responses': 'Pity and fear. You want to evoke that in the reader'.[83] Indeed, the book ends with the interrogation of the murderer, who 'sees already the holsters and

[80] Patrick Parrinder, *The Failure of Theory: Essays on Criticism and Contemporary Fiction* (Brighton: Harvester, 1987), p. 165.
[81] Lorna Sage, *Women in the House of Fiction: Post-War Women Novelists* (New York: Routledge, 1992), p. 142.
[82] Timothy C. Baker has provided an insightful analysis of *The Driver's Seat* through the lens of the #MeToo movement. See Timothy C. Baker, 'Fear and Pity, Pity and Fear: Rereading Muriel Spark's *The Driver's Seat* in the Age of #MeToo', *FRAME*, 32 (2019), 49-64.
[83] Christie, p. 15.

epaulets [of the police officers] and all those trappings devised to protect them from the indecent exposure of fear and pity, pity and fear (*DS*, 90). In ending the novel with the Aristotelian elements of Greek tragedy set against symbols of power, Spark suggests that the power of bureaucratic hierarchy shields the policemen from the uncomfortable experience of understanding the suffering of their subjects.[84] Yet Spark's evocation of 'pity and fear' does not lead the reader to Aristotelian catharsis; instead, it is part of an unsentimental mode which, much like the Brechtian 'alienation effect', seeks to elicit 'a more deliberate cunning, a more derisive undermining of what is wrong' (DA, 29).

As these examples have demonstrated, Spark is highly suspicious of sentimentalism. However, this does not mean that her unsentimental mode advocates cold rationalism or lack of compassion. Spark's unsentimental mode encourages us to adopt the position of the other from a cognitive rather than emotional standpoint, recognising that empathy often serves to obliterate the other's inalienable difference from the self. In doing so, Spark aligns herself with mid-century women writers such as Simone Weil, Hannah Arendt and Diane Arbus who believe that emotional detachment can encourage agency and social engagement, and therefore, chart an alternative path to social justice.[85] Spark's fiction thus makes an important contribution to 'a countertradition of ethical relation, one that seeks not to come face-to-face with the other but to come face-to-face with reality in the presence of others'.[86] Spark's generation witnessed how the Germans' inability to address reality led to dangerous forms of self-delusion. In response, some mid-century women intellectuals such as Arbus, Arendt, McCarthy and Weil developed an 'aesthetic of the fact' as a tool to reach a reality which had become deeply alienating.[87] Their definition of fact, however, was not simply information. As Deborah Nelson points out,

> [f]acing facts […] does not mean simply knowing them… If facts alone could lead us to the promised land – facts about climate change, gun violence, terrorism, war, racial prejudice, economic inequality – then we already live in a paradise of facts. The problem is not that we do not know what is happening but that we cannot bear to be changed by that knowledge.[88]

Spark's unsentimental mode, inspired by her involvement in propaganda at the PWE, may be disturbing at times, but succeeds in encouraging readers to come face-to-face with reality, and be changed, whatever the cost.

[84] See Aristotle, *Poetics*, trans. by S. H. Butcher, 3rd edn (London: Macmillan, 1902).
[85] Nelson, p. 11.
[86] Nelson, p. 73-4.
[87] Nelson, p. 79.
[88] Nelson, p. 14.

Conclusion

Spark's wartime employment in black propaganda was a formative experience for her future career as a novelist. It both issued a warning about the dangers of the imagination when unrestrained by ethical concern and elevated fiction as a medium not dissimilar to black propaganda in its capacity to lay bare the workings of political ideologies and encourage independent thought. In particular, her PWE work influenced her moral outlook, bringing to the fore the complexities of negotiating national and personal loyalties, the pedagogic potential of democratic propaganda (particularly in the context of states of exception), the difficulty of establishing egalitarian relationships with foreign nationals, and the pitfalls of sentimentality as a path to social justice. I have argued that Spark's fiction negotiates such complexities by adopting and morally justifying an ethics of deception, understood as a situational, rather than prescriptive, approach to social and political judgement in the context of historical states of exception such as the Second World War and the Holocaust. This approach, described by Jonathan Glover as 'moral imagination', can originate from either emotion or intellect, but requires an 'awareness of the effects of distance or of dehumanizing people' capable of moving individuals towards thoughtfulness.[89]

PWE propaganda, even if unsavoury at times, embraced the moral imagination insofar as it sought to expose the inconsistencies ingrained in National Socialist discourse with a view to moving German citizens to think for themselves in the hope that they would start doubting their government and disregarding its rules. As such, it may be morally justified within a 'state of exception' in the war against fascism. Similarly, Spark's fiction advocates the exercise of moral imagination to inform individual moral choices in historically contingent states of exception. Spark thus supports an ethics of deception as the most effective method to make individuals question the status quo and establish more humane engagement with others. As this chapter has demonstrated, Sandy's contestation of Miss Brodie's totalitarianism and Barbara Vaughan's rebellion against thoughtless commitment to political and religious ideologies in response to the Eichmann's trial testify to the merits of using the moral imagination as a tool for guiding our judgement and challenging injustice while Paul's unsubstantiated betrayal of Kiel and Mrs. Hawkins' neglect of Wanda showcase the dangers of falling short of this task.

Spark's unsentimental mode of fiction-writing draws on her ethics of deception. Spark witnessed how the PWE used emotion to manipulate the behaviour of its enemy audience and realised that truly liberating art must necessarily be unsentimental. Like Arbus, Arendt, McCarthy

[89] Glover, p. 409.

and Weil, Spark sought to offer perceptive insights into the suffering unleashed by the Second World War 'with directness and clarity and without consolation or compensation'.[90] Although Bradbury, Kermode and Whittaker have viewed her unsentimental mode through a religious lens, I have suggested that it developed primarily through her political experience at the PWE, an intelligence agency which required a detailed, yet detached, knowledge of the mind of the enemy in order to craft effective propaganda. Spark, like PWE propagandists, adopts an unsentimental mode to craft stories. Unlike PWE propaganda, however, Spark's unsentimental mode does not seek to foreclose, but to open 'doors and windows in the mind', acting as an antidote to the kinds of moral blindness and prejudice so often elicited by propaganda.[91]

[90] Nelson, p. 2.
[91] Alan Taylor, 'The Gospel According to Spark', *Sunday Herald*, 22nd February 2004, p. 27.

3. Sound Technologies and the Aesthetics of Interruption

Introduction

From an early age, Muriel Spark was 'an avid listener' who would attend to the conversations taking place around her and relish the insights they provided into the speakers' personalities when going visiting with her mother; well before becoming a writer, she was already 'a person-watcher, a behaviourist' (*CV*, 25-7). Born into a working-class family, however, she did not immediately have access to new sound technologies. Her childhood home did not have a telephone and she communicated with her best friend Frances Niven via letters that would be exchanged the next day at school (*CV*, 95). Spark had access to a rudimentary wireless set built by her brother, but this could only provide 'a fugitive and intermittent programme from the BBC'; in contrast, the home of music hall singer Florrie Forde, which Spark visited with her Auntie Gertie, was furnished with an 'enormous wireless set with multi-coloured, illuminated "valves"' (*CV*, 24). Such cutting-edge technology, 'as yet beyond [her] means' and only affordable to the working classes from the mid-1940s, made a deep impression on young Spark.[1] Even after her time in Africa, her separation from her husband Sydney Oswald Spark, and her return to Britain in early 1944, communications with her ex-husband and her son's school in Africa were conducted in epistolary fashion and she was frustrated that 'letters often took two months to arrive and correspondence was persistently out of date'.[2]

Spark's subsequent PWE work arguably constituted her first training in the systematic use of sound technologies – particularly the telephone and the wireless – and their valuable potential for intelligence gathering and mass persuasion. Milton Bryan was a technologically sophisticated intelligence facility: it 'contained studios, a record library, intelligence files and newspaper and radio newsrooms'.[3] As secretarial staff with no knowledge of the German language, Spark was not directly involved in PWE broadcasting to Germany, but she 'worked in Delmer's small office adjacent to the rackety radio newsroom, and in another office used a green-painted "scrambler" telephone, taking down the processed reports of recently returned aircrews'.[4] In the radio newsroom, a Hell-Schreiber teleprinter offered invaluable access to the German news; it was operated by German Jewish escapees, whose contributions to the Allied war effort 'must have given them immense satisfaction' (*CV*, 153). Biographical accounts of Spark's employment

[1] Andrew Crisell, *Understanding Radio*, 2nd edn (London and New York: Routledge, 1994), p. 19.
[2] Stannard, *Muriel Spark*, p. 62.
[3] Stannard, *Muriel Spark*, p. 65.
[4] Stannard, *Muriel Spark*, p. 65.

at the PWE thus reveal her familiarity with the crucial role of sound technologies – in particular, the scrambler telephone and the wireless – for gathering intelligence and transmitting covert propaganda to the enemy, respectively.

By the time Spark joined Milton Bryan, the PWE was in charge of 48 radio stations, also known as Research Units.[5] Delmer describes the site as a true 'melting pot' of identities, where 'German refugees, German prisoners, Balkan beauties, Italians, Hungarians, Rumanians, Bulgarians, British girl secretaries, British and American editors and executives [...] jostled each other [...] talking their different languages and their assorted varieties of English' (*BB*, 148). Indeed, foreign language expertise was prized because the PWE was said to broadcast 'in 23 languages [...] over 1,200,000 words weekly', or in layman's terms, 'as many words as would fill two novels each of the length of Tolstoy's "War and Peace"'.[6] Ellic Howe estimates that Delmer headed 'a team of about a hundred collaborators including about forty German POWs' and a few deserters who were tasked with voicing PWE broadcasts to Germany (*BG*, 235). The use of native German speakers was essential for this role because the broadcasts aimed to disguise themselves as German even though they in fact originated from Britain.

Delmer's first radio station, *Gustav Siegfried Eins* (*Der Chef*), purported to communicate the views of 'a die-hard of the old Prussian school', who was 'loyal and devoted to the Führer, but scathingly contemptuous of the "rabble" that had seized control of the Fatherland in the Führer's name' with the aim of creating division between the Army and the Nazi Party (*BB*, 42). However, *Der Chef*'s voice actually belonged to Corporal Paul Sanders, a Berliner who, disgusted by Nazi behaviour towards the Jews, had abandoned Germany for Britain, first joining the Pioneer Corps in France and later SO2, a precursor of the SOE. There, he was identified as a valuable asset and offered work in political warfare at Milton Bryan (*BB*, 49). Although he lacked broadcasting experience and initially struggled to work with the microphone, Delmer was pleased with his voice because it was 'just right for The Chief as [he] envisaged him, virile and resonant with just that slight trace of a Berlin drawl which [he] had found so often in the speech of Junker officers of the Kaiser's guards regiments' (*BB*, 49-50). Indeed, PWE broadcasting voices had to sound authentically German in order to gain the credibility which would allow them to poison German citizens against the Nazi regime. Since the broadcaster's 'acousmatic' voice acted as the primary marker of identity to the enemy audience, faultless elocution was a necessity, lest the deception would be given away.

[5] Brooks, p. 142.
[6] FO 898/99, Lectures. 1943.

Mladen Dolar defines the acousmatic voice as 'a voice whose source one cannot see, a voice whose origin cannot be identified, a voice one cannot place'.[7] Its history can be traced back to Ancient Greece, where Pythagoras would teach his disciples from behind a veil, both to avoid visual interference and to impart greater authority.[8] Biblical representations of God are often acousmatic too. Muriel Spark's beloved 'Book of Job', for example, depicts God's voice addressing a fearful Job from a whirlwind, thus suggesting the existence of 'a direct hidden link between the acousmatic voice and divinization'.[9] Such association also foreshadows the connection that critics such as Theodor Adorno have established between the acousmatic voice and totalitarian movements, an issue to which I will return later in this chapter. Despite its disembodied nature, the acousmatic voice is at the root of identity, as demonstrated by the Biblical story of Jacob and Esau. Jacob wears goat skin to feign his brother's hairy hands and deceive his aged and blind father Isaac into granting him Esau's rightful blessing. However, Isaac's recognition of Jacob's voice almost unveils his trickery; as Jacob states, '[t]he voice *is* Jacob's voice, but the hands *are* the hands of Esau'.[10] As Adriana Cavarero concludes in her study of vocal expression, 'unlike the touchable surface of the body and its smell, the voice [...] cannot be disguised'.[11]

Spark's PWE experience contributed to her perceptive understanding of the individuality of the voice. In fact, a chance encounter described in her autobiography *Curriculum Vitae* testifies to the post-war legacies of wartime scrambled conversations:

> One day in New York in the early sixties I met a man in my agent's office whom I felt I had met before. I couldn't place him and he certainly couldn't place me. By careful checking back into the past, it emerged that this man, René de Chochor, had been one of the SHAEF information officers who had phoned me on the scrambler, for so many nights, at M.B. I had remembered the voice although I had never seen the face, never actually "met" him, in fact (*CV*, 153).

Spark's recognition of René de Chochor is based on his voice, which acts 'like a fingerprint, instantly recognizable and identifiable' as a genuine marker of identity whose presence lingers in Spark's aural memory well after the end of conflict.[12] Although such non-linguistic individuality appears to exceed signification, its absence in mechanically produced voices evokes 'a touch of the uncanny', which serves to cement its ultimate communicative significance.[13]

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[7] Mladen Dolar, *A Voice and Nothing More* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2006), p. 60.
[8] Dolar, p. 61.
[9] Dolar, p. 62.
[10] *The Bible: Authorized King James Version*, ed. by Robert Carroll and Stephen Prickett (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), I Moses 27.22.
[11] Adriana Cavarero, *For More than One Voice: Toward a Philosophy of Vocal Expression*, trans. by Paul A. Kottman (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2005), p. 24.
[12] Dolar, p. 22.
[13] Dolar, p. 22.

Sound technologies are inherently acousmatic, but their ubiquitous presence from the mid-twentieth century has led to disregard for their aural sources, which have simply been supplanted by the technological objects. In fact, Jonathan Sterne is critical of acousmatic definitions of sound technologies because they rely on 'a questionable set of prior assumptions about the fundamental nature of sound, communication, and experience' such as the prioritisation of face-to-face communication and bodily presence, the assumption that alienating the voice from the body is disorienting and the depiction of sound technologies as neutral channels of communication.[14] Without contradicting Sterne's valid concerns, I suggest that acousmaticity is still a useful notion when considering the role of sound technologies in the dissemination of covert propaganda. The PWE was quick to adopt the wireless as a weapon for deception precisely because it enables the concealment of bodily identity through the speaker's voice. Such 'slippage between the embodied subject and the disembodied voice' which gives rise to a new, performative aural subjectivity, has been theorised by Pamela L. Caughie as 'passing'.[15] Acousmaticity is essential for the propagandist 'passing' as a German citizen because it allows their identity to become '*envoiced*—and thus inseparable from the technologies that produce it'.[16]

Since the PWE relied on feigned aural identities for covert propaganda, broadcasting voices necessarily had to ring true, and measures were taken to prevent them from giving away the deception. For example, white propaganda voices who broadcast on the BBC German Service were banned from engaging in black propaganda, and even within black propaganda itself, stations tended to retain their own speakers.[17] However, the PWE was not immune to the occasional blunder. For example, PWE broadcaster Peter W. recalled 'once, on the air, pronouncing 'Hannover' with the stress on the first syllable – an unfortunate solecism which did not go unnoticed'.[18] In *Curriculum Vitae*, Spark reports an even more concerning incident with a POW who, following his broadcasting work for the PWE, was sent back to the POW camp and interviewed for a prisoners' 'Hallo, Folks' programme:

> Our security surveillance slipped up and his voice, which had hitherto broadcast on our Radio Calais, now went over the air in the prison-camp context. It was recognisable as a voice, and traceable. Whether that fool's voice was, in fact, ever

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[14] Jonathan Sterne, *The Audible Past: Cultural Origins of Sound Reproduction* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003), pp. 20-1.

[15] Pamela L. Caughie, 'Audible Identities: Passing and Sound Technologies', *Humanities Research*, 16 (2010), 91–109 (p. 94). In Second World War sabotage, 'passing' was a strategy used by female SOE agents to disguise themselves as French civilians. See Juliette Pattinson, *Behind Enemy Lines: Gender, Passing and the Special Operations Executive in the Second World War* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2007).

[16] Caughie, p. 97.

[17] Cat. No. 5038, Account of Service in Black Radio Propaganda (Political Warfare Executive) by Peter W., 1983, pp. 1-17 (p. 7), Archive of the IWM, UK.

[18] Account of Service in Black Radio Propaganda (Political Warfare Executive) by Peter W., p. 10.

> recognized, or his identity traced to his family (with almost certain reprisals), I never heard (*CV*, 159).

A fictionalised version of this event would go on to feature in her novel *The Hothouse by the East River*. Although sound technologies certainly resist disacousmatization – i.e., the disclosure of their visual referents –, this example evidently illustrates the fact that PWE voices remained in perpetual danger of exposure as the voice of the enemy to German listeners.

In the early 20th century, intellectuals such as Bertolt Brecht and Walter Benjamin viewed the wireless as having a unique, and potentially transformative, potential for the democratic education of audiences beyond the theatre hall, which could potentially lead to a more equitable society.[19] However, by the 1930s, there was growing scepticism about the prospect of the wireless bringing about a social revolution. Instead, mass communications became associated with the rise of totalitarianism and the wireless was recast as 'invisible puppet strings with the potential to manipulate the earth's docile population'.[20] In particular, the rise of the corporate radio 'network' generated cultural fears about its 'potential for social control and mass catastrophe'.[21] According to Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno, such fears reflect the homogenous nature of the 'culture industry' under late capitalism, which uses the wireless 'to expose [listeners] in authoritarian fashion to the same programs put out by different stations' without the possibility of expressing dissenting views.[22]

In particular, Adorno shows concern that the 'illusion of closeness' brought about by the acousmatic nature of the radio voice could lend the medium unwarranted authority:

> Attributing the sound of radio to the real, present radio set may make people who are not concentrating attentively forget the unreality of what they are hearing. [...] The absence of visible persons makes the "radio voice" appear more objective and infallible than a live voice.[23]

In particular, the radio voice is most intrusive when addressing listeners privately and personally because mass culture has enabled the atomisation of the public to the extent that individuals have become more susceptible to political persuasion; as a result, the authority of the radio voice 'no longer appear[s] to come from outside', but, like propaganda, appears to come from the individual.[24] For Brecht, the problem with wireless is that it is a medium for distribution rather

[19] Melissa Dinsman, *Modernism at the Microphone: Radio, Propaganda, and Literary Aesthetics during World War II* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2015), pp. 17-8.
[20] Jeffrey Sconce, *Haunted Media: Electronic Presence from Telegraphy to Television* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2000), p. 94.
[21] Sconce, p. 108.
[22] Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment: Philosophical Fragments*, trans. by Edmund Jephcott (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2002), pp. 94-6.
[23] Theodor W. Adorno, 'Radio Physiognomics', in *Current of Music: Elements of a Radio Theory* (Cambridge: Polity, 2009), pp. 41-132 (p. 47).
[24] Adorno, 'Radio Physiognomics', p. 70.

than communication: it is 'one-sided when it should be two-sided' and does not understand how 'to receive as well as to transmit, how to let the listener speak as well as hear, how to bring him into a network instead of isolating him'.[25] Furthermore, Brecht believed that, instead of simply acting as a source of entertainment, the wireless should fulfil the social function of providing state accountability.[26] Like Brecht, Walter Benjamin also agreed that the wireless' fatal flaw is its maintenance of 'the fundamental separation between practitioners and the public'.[27] Such a totalitarian understanding of the wireless is not surprising insofar as German Minister of Propaganda Joseph Goebbels believed the radio to be 'the eighth great power' which enabled the rise of National Socialism. In fact, the Nazi party made regular use of domestic and foreign broadcasts to disseminate the Nazi message at home and demoralise the Allied abroad. The programme *Germany Calling*, broadcast by William Joyce, best-known as Lord Haw-Haw, was Germany's main, and overall unsuccessful attempt to propagandise the British.[28]

Although the bleak association between unidirectional transmission and totalitarian oppression appears to foreclose the wireless's capacity to promote democratic debate, both Brecht and Adorno suggest potential avenues for resistance and contestation which resonate with Spark's own representation of the medium in her literary work. Writing on epic theatre, Brecht draws attention to the pedagogic role of the 'alienation effect', which aims to prevent the audience 'from simply identifying itself with the characters in the play' so that their behaviour is evaluated 'on a conscious plane, instead of, as hitherto, in the audience's subconscious', thereby leading to the development of a more critical stance.[29] When applied to the wireless, the alienation effect can dismantle audience identification and encourage conscious reflection which might conduce to social change. Despite his overall unfavourable opinion on mass communications, Adorno's writing also offers a glimmer of hope, located in the precarious sense of individuality which may resist, even if provisionally, the mass appeal of the wireless.[30] Taking her cue from these optimistic proposals and influenced by PWE broadcasting, Spark's writing is overall enthusiastic about the revolutionary potential of sound technologies.

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[25] Bertolt Brecht, 'The Radio as a Communications Apparatus', in *Brecht on Film and Radio*, ed. by Eric Silberman (London: Bloomsbury Methuen Drama, 2000), pp. 41-6 (p. 42).
[26] Brecht, 'The Radio as a Communications Apparatus', p. 43.
[27] Walter Benjamin, 'Reflections on Radio', in *The Work of Art in the Age of Its Technological Reproducibility, and Other Writings on Media*, ed. by Michael W. Jennings, Brigid Doherty, and Thomas Y. Levin (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2008), pp. 391-2 (p. 391).
[28] Jean Seaton, interviewed for *Every Case Tells a Story: Treason on Trial* (BBC Radio 4, January 15, 2016).
[29] Brecht, 'Alienation Effects in Chinese Acting', p. 91.
[30] David Jenemann, 'Flying Solo: The Charms of the Radio Body', in *Broadcasting Modernism*, ed. by Debra Rae Cohen, Michael Coyle and Jane Lewty (Gainesville, FL: University of Florida Press, 2009), pp. 89-103 (p. 101).

In this chapter, I argue that Spark's fictional representation of sound technologies embraces a Brechtian 'alienation effect' – what I call an aesthetics of interruption – as an epistemological tool to challenge entrenched beliefs and encourage critical thought. Like Adorno, Spark targets such aesthetics of interruption at the individual rather than the social mass. However, Spark's aesthetics of interruption, which seeks to foster plural perspectives, is not a magic bullet for social revolution, but requires the conscious exercise of scepticism and reflection. PWE broadcasting provided German citizens with suggestive material to help them rethink their entanglement with autocratic mass communications at a time when the freedom to think independently was gravely at risk. Through analysis of the fictional deployment of scrambled telephony and wireless intrusion in her fiction, I contend that Spark's aesthetics of interruption fulfils a similar role.

1. Scrambled Telephony: Precarious Lines and Affective Disconnections

Successful wartime propaganda depended on a constant supply of reliable and up-to-date intelligence, information which – to guarantee security – British propagandists often received via a scrambler telephone. The PWE most likely had access to a Secraphone or A-3 Scrambler, a green painted telephone which used 'Frequency Domain Scrambling' – a technique for inverting a telephone signal 'around a chosen frequency, so that the high frequencies become low and vice versa' – in order to conceal the speakers' voices.[31] Delmer trusted the scrambler to allow conversation 'in complete confidence of secrecy, knowing that anyone trying to listen in would hear nothing but a meaningless jumble' (*BB*, 81). However, the instrument relied on outdated technology and could not guarantee secure speech. In fact, the Allies were unaware that the Germans had already managed 'to eavesdrop on A-3 using a site on the Dutch coast, and by 1940 had begun to intercept calls between Roosevelt and Churchill that used this system'.[32] At the same time, Alan Turing was collaborating with Bell Telephone Laboratories to create Sigsaly, the first digitally-encrypted scrambler, which disguised 'any given data stream A with the envelope curves of another sound sequence B [...] after a switching matrix [had] changed the frequency of the envelope curves by way of free permutation'.[33] Sigsaly was considerably more reliable than previous scrambler telephones and there is no record of any wartime conversation which used this system being broken; unfortunately, it was only made

[31] Sheila Mair, 'Scrambled Phones', <https://blog.sciencemuseum.org.uk/scrambled-phones/> [accessed 18th May 2020].
[32] Robert Aldrich, 'Whitehall Wiring: The Communications-Electronics Security Group and the Struggle for Secure Speech', *Public Policy and Administration*, 28 (2012), 178-95 (p. 185).
[33] Friedrich A. Kittler, *Gramophone, Film, Typewriter* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1999), p. 49.

available to high command and most government officials continued using Secraphones or A-3 Scramblers during and after the war.[34]

Figure 4: Second World War scrambler telephone (SA5063/1 unit) © Crypto Museum.

Spark's PWE work required use of a scrambler telephone. In *Curriculum Vitae*, she describes how its 'continual jangling noise made interception difficult', forcing one 'to listen "through" the jangle' (*CV*, 152). Spark operated the scrambler to collect intelligence from the returning Allied bombers, which would lay the foundations for the creation of PWE propaganda. In Spark's conversations with the Allied bombers, the scrambler telephone acted as a liminal technology allowing 'the transfer of feeling at a distance', which, like the broken glass invading Spark's own room at the Helena Club during a time of incendiary bombs, connected the would-be author to first-hand experience of the 'real war'.[35] The often harrowing news Spark received through the scrambler telephone were essential for the PWE to successfully mislead the German enemy. Unlike Christine Brooke-Rose, whose fictionalised biography *Remake* (1996) describes her 'detached' experience of wartime intelligence work at Bletchley Park 'as pure information on teleprints, index-cards and maps, well-protected in the peaceful Buckinghamshire countryside [and] never experiencing the grime, the cold, the heat, the suffering, the corpses, the landmines,

[34] Aldrich, 'Whitehall Wiring', pp. 185-6.
[35] David Trotter, 'e-Modernism: Telephony in British Fiction 1925-1940', *Critical Quarterly*, 51 (2009), 1-32 (p. 2).

the tanks...', Spark's use of the scrambler telephone enables her to bridge warfare and everyday life and intertwine the national with the personal.[36]

Spark was also responsible for answering another nightly call from the newsroom of the Foreign Office, which provided 'general news not yet released for the next day's newspapers' (*CV*, 153). While the armed forces call remained business-like, the Foreign Office call 'would often lapse into the personal' and soon developed into Spark's 'long and charming friendship' with her interlocutor, Colin Methven (*CV*, 153). Methven would often meet Spark during her London leave and would take her to the theatre, the park, or the zoo; he was an older and more experienced man who was able to contribute interesting conversation and a good dose of fun (*CV*, 154). Their letters, preserved at the National Library of Scotland, feature no reference to their intelligence work – both Spark and Methven were bound by the Official Secrets Act – but offer a glimpse into a friendship sparked by wartime telephony. Methven became a faithful friend who offered Spark material and spiritual sustenance at difficult times; for example, offering to lend her furniture for the flat she had been promised by the Poetry Society – a flat which never materialised – and generously sharing his wine supplies.[37] Spark's Foreign Office communications with Methven soon exceeded their purely bureaucratic function and embraced the 'connective sociability' which puts 'one person's privacy directly and immediately in touch'.[38] Spark's realization of the social potential of telephony triggered what she described as her 'addiction to the telephone' and representations of the medium would subsequently loom large in her fiction (*CV*, 163).

As her most obviously telephonic novel, *Memento Mori* (1959) has been the subject of extensive criticism from a media perspective.[39] Initially framed as a detective story, the novel is punctuated by recurrent telephone calls addressed to a group of elderly characters which convey a single message: '*Remember you must die'* (*MM*, 2). Dame Lettie, one of the elderly, frantically attempts to determine the identity of the mysterious caller, but this detail remains undisclosed

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[36] Christine Brooke-Rose, *Remake* (Manchester: Carcanet, 1996), p. 108. Although *Remake* primarily depicts Brooke-Rose's experience of the war as 'pure information', Natalie Ferris has noted that her 'wireless voice' – a voice with no origin and no destination that features prominently in her early poetry – offers an attempt to represent, in its polyvocality and sensory quality, the psychological toll of modern warfare. See Natalie Ferris, '"savage warnings and notations": The Women Charting New Sensory Terrains in the Wake of Intelligence Work', *Modernist Cultures*, 16 (2021), 546-67.

[37] Acc. 10607/107, Correspondence with Colin Methven, 1945-52, Muriel Spark Archive, NLS, UK.

[38] David Trotter, *Literature in the First Media Age: Britain between the Wars* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2013), p. 38.

[39] See Nicholas Royle, 'Memento Mori', in *Theorizing Muriel Spark: Gender, Race, Deconstruction*, ed. by Martin McQuillan (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002), pp. 189-203 and Elizabeth Anne Weston, 'The Comic Uncanny in Muriel Spark's *Memento Mori'*, *Scottish Literary Review*, 9 (2017), 117-36.

throughout the novel, leading policeman Henry Mortimer to conclude that 'the author of the anonymous telephone calls is Death himself [...] If you don't remember Death, Death reminds you to do so' (*MM*, 174). *Memento Mori* adopts telephony as a vehicle for the ontological reflection which permeates Spark's early writing following her conversion to Catholicism in 1954. Through the mysterious telephone calls, presumed to come from the beyond, Spark interrogates the meaning of life and death in an inscrutable world devoid of human scripts; we perpetually strive for meaning among chaos, yet fail to grasp our overall purpose. As film director Tom Richards suggests in Spark's *Reality and Dreams*, we might all be 'characters in one of God's dreams' (*RD*, 1).

Unlike Sartre, whose atheistic existentialism dismisses the possibility of divine intervention in human affairs as either fiction or madness, Spark's early novels refuse to detach the natural from the supernatural.[40] Such a permeable boundary is often explored through sound technologies, since they lend themselves to testing the nature of existence. From Caroline Rose's use of a tape recorder to empirically determine the reality of her inner voices in *The Comforters* to the uncanny telephone calls which appear to foretell death in *Memento Mori*, Spark draws attention to what Mladen Dolar describes as 'the first ontological decision': the precarious threshold between external and internal voices.[41] Are the phone calls ontologically real or imaginary? Have the elderly, amateur gerontologist Alec Warner wonders, considered 'the possibility of mass-hysteria?' (*MM*, 150). While Spark's later fiction does not entirely abandon such ontological considerations, I argue that it primarily positions telephony as an epistemological tool capable of exposing self-deception and revealing hitherto concealed aspects of reality. Spark is fascinated by the production of truth as rhetorical performance and her fiction often examines how propaganda succeeds precisely by conveying information we want to believe in, thus promoting self-deception. Putting ontological telephony on hold, this chapter concentrates on Spark's fictional engagement with epistemological telephony, which has received marginal attention to date.

According to Woodbury Tease, Spark's fictional treatment of media technologies builds on the modernist preoccupation with the relationship between individuals and machines.[42] In her analysis of *The Girls of Slender Means*, for example, the scrambling that pierces Jane's telephone conversation to her former author Rudi, preventing him from ever finding out how the aspiring

[40] Cairns Craig, *Muriel Spark, Existentialism and the Art of Death* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2019), pp. 23-4.
[41] Dolar, p. 80.
[42] Amy Woodbury Tease, 'Call and Answer: Muriel Spark and Media Culture', *MFS Modern Fiction Studies*, 62 (2016), 70-91 (p. 72).

writer and intelligence officer Nicholas Farrington died, is seen to 'reflect the failure of the medium to deliver the message'.[43] Without contradicting Woodbury Tease, I suggest that Spark's representation of telephony, particularly in her mid-career fiction, is historically contingent, pointing to anxieties about secure speech and electronic surveillance emerging from Second World War intelligence, Cold War surveillance and the Watergate scandal (1972-74). Moving beyond the modernist preoccupation with technological malfunction, Spark's 'scrambler fiction' of the 1970s shows how the 'human factor' contributes to hindering direct voice communication, as well as the affective connections that telephony affords. Evelyn Waugh's *Vile Bodies* (1930) – described as 'the first English novel in which dialogue on the telephone plays a large part' – provides a classic example of modernist telephony and a useful point of comparison with Spark's late modernist writing, as exemplified by her children's short story 'The Small Telephone'.[44]

Vile Bodies is a satire of the glamorous but meaningless lives of the Bright Young Things, upper-class young adults who are constantly engaged in reckless party-going and drinking. Its protagonist, Adam Fenwick-Symes, is a penniless budding writer who intends to marry wealthy heiress Nina Blount, but their relationship suffers from a comic series of unfortunate events which lead it to the brink of dissolution as a result of Adam's inability to achieve financial security. Adam and Nina's relationship is conducted largely on the telephone; Adam regularly rings Nina to confirm or disallow their marriage, but the medium remains a passive and insensitive receptacle, impervious to their affective states. Despite Adam and Nina's recurrent attempts to elicit feeling, their linguistic expression is detached and unable to bridge the barrier erected by the aloofness of the line. Their responses to deeply-emotional life-changing news, is simply '"I see."', and any further affective promptings such as '"Well?"' receive a dispassionate retort: '"I said, I see"'.[45] Such exchange demonstrates Waugh's belief that 'one could make regular functional use of the telephone [...] without in any way being altered by the experience'.[46] Whereas Waugh views the telephone as a detached medium and expresses nostalgia for a lost world of unmediated communications, Spark welcomes the advent of the telephone, which she regards as a deeply human instrument, capable of providing new, and potentially transformative, ways of transmitting affect.

'The Small Telephone' demonstrates Spark's interest in the telephone as a vehicle for affect. Its protagonist, Doctor Downie, is a small and lonely telephone who lives in an unoccupied

[43] Woodbury Tease, 'Call and Answer', p. 83.
[44] Evelyn Waugh, *Vile Bodies* (London: Penguin, 2011), p. x.
[45] Waugh, pp. 219-21. For a detailed analysis of the telephonic conversations in Chapter 11, see Bronwen E. Thomas, '"It's Good to Talk"?: An Analysis of a Telephone Conversation from Evelyn Waugh's *Vile Bodies*', *Language and Literature*, 6 (1997), 105-19.
[46] Trotter, 'e-Modernism', p. 22.

house and therefore receives no phone calls. One day, Doctor Downie's wires accidentally get crossed with those of Snowdrop Bentley Fergusson, a 'latest model' pink telephone who belongs to a famous actress. Desperate for communicating with another telephone, Doctor Downie promptly explains that he is 'very lonely for someone to speak to. Tell me what you think of this dreadful weather' (ST, 39). Doctor Downie's attempt to keep Snowdrop on the line is not motivated by the need to exchange information; instead, his request is purely phatic, intended to remain in contact with his receiver. Unfortunately, Snowdrop turns out to be a vain and materialistic telephone who has no time for Doctor Downie, being primarily preoccupied with contacting her banker about her savings. In fact, Snowdrop recurrently belittles Doctor Downie and ridicules his desire to form an affective bond with another telephone to the extent that she threatens to put him in touch with 'a very old, deaf telephone called Wood. You could talk to her, but she won't hear a word you say. She can't even hear her own bell' (ST, 41). The prospect of addressing Wood, a telephone that promises unanswered communication, is certainly Doctor Downie's greatest nightmare.

Luckily, Doctor Downie's wires eventually get crossed with those of the famous actress Miranda Judith, the owner of Snowdrop, who happens to be looking for a 'good and cheerful telephone' for conducting her business matters (ST, 43). On realising that Doctor Downie is exactly what she is looking for, Miranda decides to move into Doctor Downie's home and use him as her primary telephone. Having overcome his isolation, Doctor Downie finds pleasure in belonging to a telephone community, for Miranda's friends 'all spoke into Doctor Downie, one after the other, every day, morning, noon and night' (ST, 44). Indeed, Miranda's view that '[o]ne is as good as married to one's telephone, after all' strongly resonates with Spark's aforementioned 'addiction to the telephone' (ST, 44; *CV*, 163). Unlike *Vile Bodies*, 'The Small Telephone' portrays the telephone as a social and affective medium whose primary purpose is simply to enable people to stay in touch. In particular, Spark's fiction frequently represents the telephone as a conduct for memory, capable of shaping how characters perceive their past experiences and social relationships, as testified by *The Hothouse by the East River* and *Territorial Rights*, respectively.

1.1 Scrambling a Post-War Fantasy: *The Hothouse by the East River*

The Hothouse by the East River is the novel which most closely and literally depicts Spark's work for the PWE. Its central character Elsa, like Spark, was tasked with writing down military intelligence when working in secret propaganda alongside her husband Paul during the Second World War. Her role similarly involved the use of

> a special green telephone [...] whose connection is heavily jammed with jangling caterwauls to protect the conversation against eavesdropping; this harrowing noise all but prevents the speakers from hearing each other, but once the knack is mastered it is easy to hear the voice at the other end giving such information as flight details from newly-returned bomber missions, the numbers sent, the numbers lost, the numbers of enemy planes felled. Numbers and numbers over Germany and France. Cities and factories. Pinpoints and numbers piercing the scrambler (*HER*, 50).

At first glance, such an account seems to align with Brooke-Rose's experience of warfare as unfiltered data with strategic value. However, Spark's carefully worded description of scrambler listening as 'harrowing', which conflates the message and the medium, points to the telephone's ability to exceed abstraction and communicate feeling, or lack thereof.[47]

The novel moves between the couple's realistic wartime experiences in England and their hallucinatory lives in post-war New York, which remain shrouded in secrecy. Elsa is described as a cunning schizophrenic whose thinking and behaviour must be policed by her husband and her psychiatrist Garven. Her son Pierre laments that she is no longer 'sweet and patient' and Paul complains that she is 'crazy' and he has 'to do her thinking all the time' (*HER*, 17, 33). Using psychoanalysis as a disciplinary method, Paul rationalises Elsa's lack of compliance with her family role in order to invalidate her opinions.[48] Paul's attempts to negate the fact that both Elsa and himself died during an air raid in 1944 has led to their present purgatorial nightmare, which Elsa continuously attempts to disrupt, aided and abetted by a telephone. For example, when on the phone to his son Pierre,

> Paul's attention is meanwhile eared to the voice at the other end and his free hand stretches forth with a helpless flutter to hush Elsa's talk, like the hand of that King Canute who forbade the sea to advance in order merely to illustrate the futility of the attempt. "I can't hear what you say," says Paul into the mouthpiece. "Your mother's talking" (*HER*, 46).

Elsa here conforms to Avital Ronell's characterization of the schizophrenic as a scrambled telephone line, which allows her 'to escape the puerile, reactionary dragnet of psychiatric wisdom' through 'structures of disconnection'.[49] Ronell notes that schizophrenics were particularly enthusiastic about telephony and adopted a 'rhetoric of bionic assimilation' which gave rise to a phenomenology of alertness.[50] Elsa's alertness, however, is not merely a psychiatric trait, but a consequence of her PWE work, which required a similar approach. Despite being dismissed by

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[47] I am grateful to Dr. Annabel Williams for drawing my attention to Spark's use of the adjective 'harrowing' in this excerpt, which stimulated my thinking on the affective qualities of the telephone.
[48] For a persuasive exploration of Elsa's psychiatric oppression through Laingian theory, see Maggie Tonkin, '"The Time of the Loony": Psychosis, Alienation, and R.D. Laing in the Fictions of Muriel Spark and Angela Carter', *Contemporary Women's Writing*, 9 (2015), 366-84.
[49] Avital Ronell, *The Telephone Book: Technology, Schizophrenia, Electric Speech* (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 1989), p. 110.
[50] Ronell, p. 4.

her family, Elsa is portrayed as '[m]ore [intelligent] than one can possibly calculate' – in fact, she is often absorbed in 'thinking', a subversive activity according to her husband – and her richly metaphorical language is often lost on her 'bloody literal' relatives (*HER*, 33, 17).

Paul's attempts to silence Elsa, as seen in the excerpt above, are ultimately futile. By scrambling Paul's conversation to his imaginary son, Elsa's voice severs Paul's affective longing for the continuation of the past into the present, thus negating their parenthood and forcing him to confront the delusory nature of their post-war predicament. Paul dwells on his memories of wartime England because they are characterised by friendship and adventure; they are 'more vivid' than his present, which constantly resists interpretation (*HER*, 25). New York has become 'home of the vivisectors of the mind', representing a stylised and materialistic world devoid of meaningful human connection, which Paul attempts to resist by enacting the connective sociability of a bygone era in his telephonic relationship with his imaginary son (*HER*, 7). In this context, Elsa's scrambling of the line also enacts a critique of the individualistic and affectless post-war society which has entrusted mental health to mercenary psychiatry. Elsa's refusal to adopt a motherly role is particularly suggestive given the gendered history of the telephone; Alexander Graham Bell's interest in acoustics originated from concern about his mother's deafness and the telephone's design – a handset linked via a cord to the main device – evokes 'the maternal cord reissued'.[51] Elsa's disruptive voice thus evidences her reluctance to conform to her assigned gender roles of wife and mother. Her puzzling interruption, rendered as scrambler noise, both exposes the artefactual nature of Paul's myth-making and enables the expression of Elsa's previously silenced perspective.

However, Elsa is not the only scrambling agent in the novel. The switchboard operator, who recurrently disrupts Elsa and Paul's conversation, either by disconnecting or intruding on their calls, similarly draws attention to the precarious nature of their ontological existence. When the switchboard operator inquires whether the call has finished, Paul responds:

> "I'm still talking," [...] "I'm holding on. My wife –" But he is already cut off. It takes more than half an hour for Paul to be reconnected. "Can you hold on?" says the European operator. "I can bear to suffer," Paul says (*HER*, 69).

Paul clings to the line because telephony provides reassurance of his own material existence. Through direct voice communication, Paul's sense of self – conveyed through his acousmatic voice – can be perpetuated without the need to demonstrate his bodily existence. Towards the end of the novel, Elsa also starts to view telephony as the measure of reality. After a call to her imaginary daughter Katerina, she inquires whether her husband and psychiatrist have heard the conversation. When they answer in the negative, Elsa claims that she '"just wondered if [she] was

[51] Ronell, p. 302.

real, that's all. Imaginary people can't very well have telephone calls outside of their owners' imagination"' (*HER*, 97). Paul and Elsa partake of the same 'phenomenology of disembodiment' which characterises telephony, as their ghostly voices have been brought back to life in artificial bodies; Elsa's shadow, which points in the wrong direction, and the hatching of worms under Princess Xavier's breasts testify to their insurmountable embodiment.[52] In addition, Elsa's metafictional reflection on her potentially fictional status points to her doubly denied existence – she is not simply a fictional character, but a fictional character who is not even allowed to exist within such realm because her life predates the temporal framework of the novel.

Elsa's reluctance to disclose whether she ever slept with Kiel – a German POW, previously assumed dead, who mysteriously re-appears in New York – is subsumed under the guise of secrecy. To avoid her husband's direct questioning, Elsa reminds him to '[b]e careful on the phone', a recommendation which disturbs the conversation and allows Elsa to remain evasive (*HER*, 67). Elsa's surveillance paranoia, however, echoes the 'Careless Talk Costs Lives' domestic propaganda campaign from the Second World War. As historian Jo Fox notes, by 1943 propaganda on communications security was mainly targeted at the military service and invaded both private and public spaces; phone conversations were regarded as particularly vulnerable to eavesdropping, which could occur 'through the switchboard, through careless "jabber" in public spaces, and through "closed" and crossed lines'.[53] In fact, Paul and Elsa's fears of interception seem warranted, since the frequent intrusion of the switchboard operator foregrounds the mediated nature of their call: '"Have you finished?' says the operator. "No, we're still talking," Paul says. "This is private." The operator disappears, apparently, with a click. Nevertheless, Paul adds, "Please don't interrupt"' (*HER*, 70). Paul's unease about the prospect of telephonic surveillance similarly stems from his wartime intelligence work, where intelligence gathering necessitated full confidentiality. Such a concern goes on to feature even more prominently in *The Abbess of Crewe*.

1.2 Surveillance and the Scrambling of Political Paranoia: *The Abbess of Crewe*

The Abbess of Crewe is most often read as a satire of the Watergate scandal – Nixon's orchestration of the burgling and bugging of premises used by the Democratic Party – but in fact exposes wider anxieties about the limits of individual privacy amid increasing electronic wiretapping in the post-war period. As *The Hothouse by the East River* illustrates, Paul and Elsa's wartime secrecy seeps into their personal lives; even 'in the open air, with no one near them, the

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[52] Steven Connor, *Dumbstruck: A Cultural History of Ventriloquism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), p. 363.
[53] Fox, 'Careless Talk', p. 963.

instinct to keep silent lingers until they have passed through the country gate' (*HER*, 113).[54] Such fear of outdoor surveillance is not altogether surprising, since the PWE frequently used this method to collect intelligence from POW camps; Spark notes that '[t]he walls of their quarters were bugged as were the trees under which they strolled' (*CV*, 149). Unaware of the concealed microphones, the POWs disclosed the popular complaints and gossip of the German army, as well as new wartime slang, which allowed Delmer to customise the content and update the language of his black propaganda broadcasts (*BB*, 68). Spark transposes this operation into *The Abbess of Crewe,* where she satirises Sister Alexandra's bugging of the convent grounds as a means of gathering intelligence.[55] Sister Alexandra's look at the poplars 'as if the trees were listening' is not misplaced, for she soon reveals that '[t]he trees of course are bugged [...] [w]e have our security to consider, and I'm the only arbiter of what it consists of...' (*AC*, 1-2).[56] By monitoring public opinion, Sister Alexandra aims to manipulate her fellow nuns in order to get elected as the new Abbess of Crewe.

In an interview with Martin McQuillan, Spark claimed that the Watergate scandal was 'a lark […] the dirty tricks department' and its escalation reflected the absurdity of American politics, where private matters often have a disproportionate impact on public views of the government.[57] Here, Spark's choice of language is revealing – the PWE was often described as the 'Dirty Tricks Department' – and, I suggest, traces the roots of post-war surveillance back to Second World War intelligence. In fact, before the Watergate scandal brought to light the political consequences of electronic surveillance, many world leaders were already suffering from eavesdropping paranoia. Harold Wilson, for example, would meet his Private Secretary in the toilets of Downing Street with the taps turned on and Rhodesian Prime Minister Ian Smith insisted on having delicate conversations in the ladies' toilet when visiting London to avoid the insidious

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[54] Orwell presents a similar scenario in his novel *1984*. When Winston and Julia go to the countryside to conspire, Julia advises that '[o]utside the clearing […] it was better to go quietly', showing concern that the party might have bugged the trees (p. 141).

[55] See Lewis MacLeod, 'Matters of Care and Control: Surveillance, Omniscience, and Narrative Power in *The Abbess of Crewe* and *Loitering with Intent*', in *Muriel Spark: Twenty-First-Century Perspectives*, ed. by David Herman (Baltimore, MD: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2010), pp. 203-23.

[56] Colin Kidd ascribes Spark's decision to include bugged poplars in *The Abbess of Crewe* to an anecdote recounted by Harold Macmillan at a dinner party hosted by Spark in Rome on 12th May 1974. Macmillan explained that 'when he had met the Soviet leader Khrushchev in Moscow in 1959, they walked in the garden to evade KGB eavesdroppers, though he suspected that there were microphones in the trees.' See Colin Kidd, 'All the Abbess's Nuns: Muriel Spark and the Idioms of Watergate', in *The Crooked Dividend: Essays on Muriel Spark*, ed. by Gerard Carruthers and Helen Stoddart (Glasgow: Association for Scottish Literary Studies, 2022), pp. 126-43 (p. 132). However, I believe that Macmillan's anecdote is more likely to simply have refreshed Spark's own memories of Milton Bryan, where the trees were bugged with the aim of collecting useful POW intelligence.

[57] McQuillan, '"The Same Informed Air"', p. 225.

threat of planted microphones.[58] Such anecdotes not only demonstrate the lasting legacy of wartime vigilance, but imply that the strategic placement of microphones in seemingly innocent locations may yield the most valuable intelligence. Sister Alexandra is acutely aware of this fact and ironically selects a figure of an Infant of Prague – a Catholic symbol of purity – to conceal 'the parlour's main transmitter' of electronic surveillance, knowing that it is extremely unlikely to ever be uncovered (*AC*, 64).

The acquisition of illicit knowledge is also accompanied by an obsession with secrecy which calls for the scrambler telephone. Abbess Alexandra uses 'the green line system' to reach her advisor Sister Gertrude, a missionary nun based in remote and uncivilised locations (*AC*, 15). A recurrent presence in the novel, Sister Gertrude's assistance via the green line is required whenever new scandals – Jesuits breaking into the convent, a love affair between a fellow nun and a Jesuit or the media dissemination of Abbess Alexandra's surveillance methods – threaten the convent. Yet the green line remains extremely precarious and perpetually in danger of disconnection. Abbess Alexandra's appeals for Sister Gertrude's immediate return to the convent are most often scrambled by Sister Gertrude's chronic bronchitis and her sudden hang ups. At times, objects such as a helicopter and a bell, or even meteorological conditions such as a snowstorm, contribute to the disruption of their green line conversations. But the most remarkable interruptions result from Sister Gertrude's trivial distractions, which evidence her utter lack of care about Abbess Alexandra's overly suspicious political scheming: 'Something crackles on the line. "Gertrude, are you there?" says Alexandra. Something crackles, then Gertrude's voice responds, "Sorry, I missed all that. I was tying my shoelace"' (*AC*, 32-3). In fact, Sister Gertrude remains a detached advisor who, despite her presumed loyalty to Abbess Alexandra, refuses to become implicated in her scandalous adoption of technological surveillance for personal gain. Abbess Alexandra's disclosure of the location of the Infant of Prague to Sister Gertrude ahead of her trip to Rome in fact falls on deaf ears: '"I didn't catch that," says Gertrude. "I dropped a hair-pin and picked it up"' (*AC*, 87).

Even when the green line succeeds in connecting the speakers, Sister Gertrude's advice is often bewildering and contradictory, requiring Abbess Alexandra's interpretation. For example, her initial advice to '[c]onsult Machiavelli' suggests the prioritisation of the ends over the means, but her last telephone call displays moral outrage towards the Crewe nuns, who '"have been considering the lilies and sinning exceedingly"', with Abbess Alexandra '"most grievously at fault"' (*AC*, 87). By allowing Sister Gertrude's petty concerns and her cryptic guidance to continuously scramble the green line, Spark satirises Abbess Alexandra's equally inconsequential

[58] Robert Aldrich, *GCHQ: The Uncensored Story of Britain's Most Secret Intelligence Agency* (London: HarperPress, 2010), p. 3.

plotting, which resembles the Watergate scandal in its reflection of political paranoia rather than genuine social concern.

1.3 Scrambling Affective Relationships: *Territorial Rights*

Unlike *The Hothouse by the East River* and *The Abbess of Crewe*, *Territorial Rights* does not feature an actual scrambler telephone, but telephonic uncertainty and disconnection similarly pervade the novel. Anthea's son, Robert, has left his lover Curran and moved to Venice, where he meets his father Arnold and Arnold's mistress Mary Tiller. From her home in Birmingham, Anthea suspects that her husband is having an affair and hires the services of a detective agency to investigate his infidelity, but Anthea's friend Grace – unbeknownst to Anthea, a previous mistress of Arnold – volunteers to take a holiday in Venice and uncover the truth on her behalf. Anthea uses the telephone for 'connective sociability', as it allows her to escape her solitary and tedious reality and live vicariously through Grace's foreign experiences. However, Anthea's affective need to connect with her son is perpetually thwarted. Seeking confirmation that Robert is indeed in Venice – as Grace assures her – Anthea places a telephone call to Curran's Paris apartment, where, to her dismay, 'the telephone fluted into great emptiness, rhythmically like an old barn-owl until it stopped and clicked over to the quicker hysteria of the engaged signal' (*TR*, 74). Embodying the human qualities of 'emptiness' and 'hysteria' during the missed call, the telephone is depicted as an affective medium that foregrounds the lack of meaningful connection between Anthea and her son.

Telephony is also a valuable source of intelligence for Anthea. Frustratingly, however, the telephone line tends to suddenly become unreliable whenever any significant piece of information appears to be coming her way. After enduring Grace's dull report on Italian tea-making – all the more unbearable given the expense of international telephone calls – Anthea's enquiries as to the location of Robert and Curran remain unanswered: 'The line broke down at this point and refused to be connected in spite of Anthea's frantic beating on the receiver-rest' (*TR*, 127). Her subsequent telephone conversation with Curran follows a similar pattern. When she finally manages to reach him at the Hotel Lord Byron, Curran's refusal to discuss Robert's whereabouts is mirrored by his curt telephone manners:

> 'Goodbye, Mr Curran, I'm sorry to –' she said, but he had rung off without waiting for her answer. She bustled about in some fury after that, turned on the television, changed the channel, turned it off, then settled herself down to read her novel... (*TR*, 134).

Novels and songs help Anthea to relieve her distress and find comfort amid uncooperative telephone conversations. Nonetheless, the telephone line also exposes such naivety as damaging, participating in her refusal to face stark realities about her son's identity when they finally hit home. For example, Anthea gullibly accepts that Robert has become a successful travel executive, when he is in fact a criminal, soon to become a terrorist. In this context, Grace's suspicion – followed by a disruption in the line – exposes Anthea's ill-advised embrace of Robert's fiction, which had been carefully backed up by a gift of jewellery:

> 'Oh, Grace, all I want to say is I'm thankful Robert's not in bad company and unhappy. It's the most lovely present I ever had. I don't know how much –' 'The unhappy ones are only the guilty amateurs and the neurotics,' said Grace. 'The pros are in their element.' The telephone buzzed and crackled. 'I don't hear what you're saying, Grace. It's difficult on the phone' (*TR*, 187).

By scrambling Grace's suggestion that Robert's happiness may result from his penchant for crime, the telephone succeeds in foregrounding Anthea's self-deception and disengagement from her son's actual predicament.

2. Intrusion Operations and Jamming: Propaganda Broadcasting and the Wireless Imagination

From the creation of *Gustav Siegfried Eins* (*Der Chef*) in May 1941 to the closure of *Soldatensender Calais* in April 1945, Delmer oversaw a range of black and grey radio stations broadcasting propaganda to Germany. The early radio station *Gustav Siegfried Eins* used shortwave frequencies to broadcast recorded material to German civilians, often reusing such material to maximise credibility and overcome jamming. Delmer explains that the station did not appeal to its audience directly; instead, it made individuals believe that they were eavesdropping into a ciphered conversation not intended for them (*BB*, 42). In between the ciphered messages, *Der Chef* would insert his tirades about the corruption of Nazi leaders and their unequal contribution to the war effort (*BB*, 42). *Der Chef* was not a prescriptive radio station; it allowed listeners to reflect on its stories in the expectation that they would act according to the propagandists' wishes.[59] According to Howe, *Der Chef* displayed 'plenty of imagination' but unfortunately did not have access to 'first-class intelligence material upon which to base their often inspired inventions', a complication which would be mitigated by Delmer's acquisition of a Hell-Schreiber teleprinter in late 1941 (*BG*, 113). *Der Chef* was successful and 'comebacks' from monitoring reports demonstrated that its stories had spread widely, even deceiving the Americans into believing that the station was in fact produced by the German Army (*BB*, 74-5). In October 1943, Delmer decided to close down *Der Chef* with a flamboyant performance of the chief being caught and shot by the Gestapo; however, on this occasion, the transmission engineer almost gave away the deception, for 'knowing no German and unaware of the final nature of the broadcast', he 'went through his usual routine and repeated the record an hour after the broadcast that was supposed to be his last' (*BB*, 76).

[59] Cruickshank, p. 80.

Following *Gustav Siegfried Eins*, Delmer created *Wehrmachtsender Nord*, a radio station purporting to be controlled by a German unit in Northern Norway with the aim of offering news of home to German soldiers in the area (*BG*, 137). It broadcast recorded news which painted 'a generally gloomy picture of conditions inside Germany' and encouraged Germans to prioritise personal wellbeing over national interest (*BG*, 138). *Wehrmachtsender Nord* did not prove successful, and Delmer quickly abandoned it because he was convinced that news broadcasting should be live, even if the PWE still lacked the means to make this a reality (*BB*, 78-9). With the arrival of Aspidistra, a medium wave radio transmitter purchased by Chief Engineer of Diplomatic Wireless Service HK Robin from the Radio Corporation of America in 1941, the fortunes of PWE broadcasting would dramatically improve.[60]

Aspidistra was initially used defensively to reinforce BBC broadcasts and prevent German jamming. However, against great opposition, Delmer managed to obtain its services to start a medium wave live news radio station for German soldiers, *Soldatensender Calais* (*BB*, 110-1). Delmer believed that the potency of Aspidistra (600kw) would enable the PWE to use the transmitter as an offensive weapon, as well as to reach a wider audience within Germany and beyond. *Soldatensender Calais* was accompanied by a short wave live news radio station for U-boats, *Atlantiksender*. Both were 'grey' rather than 'black' radio stations, so they did not expressly purport to originate from Germany but were careful to avoid any association with Britain. According to POW interrogation reports, German soldiers welcomed 'grey' radio stations because their mixture of 'true, half-true and invented news items interspersed with "cover" items of official German news' gave them 'full justification for assuming the source of the news to be German' in the event that that they were caught listening.[61] In addition to its power, Aspidistra's greatest strength was its ability to quickly tune in and out of frequencies, thus being able to evade German jamming. Given the German use of centralised broadcasting via regional stations, Aspidistra was able to take over a regional radio station and relay the German content – as broadcast via other regional radio stations – until the time came to insert its contentious news items (*BB*, 79). Such ability was instrumental for the development of PWE intrusion operations, whose broadcasts passed from feigning German origin to literally becoming German.

[60] Cat. No. 5134, Oral History Interview, Harold Kilner Robin interviewed by Ellic Howe, 1981, Archive of the IWM, UK.
[61] FO 898/45*, Correspondence and Memoranda on Policy.* 1942-45. Allied Propaganda in World War II: The Complete Record of the Political Warfare Executive (FO 898). TNA, UK. *Archives Unbound.* Web. 15 Sep. 2020.

In this section, I will introduce three examples of civilian and military intrusion operations – *Soldatensender Calais*, Operation Dartboard and the 'muddled voices' project – before turning to Spark's fictional adoption of this technique as part of her aesthetics of interruption.[62] I suggest that Spark's use of voice interference in *The Girls of Slender Means* (1963) and 'The First Year of My Life' (1975) is aesthetically reminiscent of PWE intrusion operations. PWE broadcasting was liberating insofar as it aimed to seep through the cracks of Nazi ideology and plant doubt in the minds of German citizens. By disturbing their unitary perspective with the provision of alternative realities, the PWE hoped to encourage critical thinking and expressions of dissent. I argue that Spark's wireless fiction is similarly optimistic about the transformative potential of the 'muddled voices' of the wireless to question unconscious beliefs and prompt more thoughtful responses to social and political challenges. Although Spark's fiction is not oblivious to the capacity of the wireless voice to produce the unconscious enchantment of the social mass, I contend that it primarily seeks to illustrate how individuals may confront and break free from such a voice.

2.1 PWE Intrusion Operations

In his 'Memories of Political Warfare 1942-45', preserved at the Imperial War Museum, former PWE propagandist Peter W. vividly recalls his experience of preparing for and enacting intrusion operations:

> My first job was concerned with monitoring German radio stations as a basis for intruder operations. [...] Our monitoring was not primarily concerned with the news content of the German output [...] but with the structure and pattern of German broadcasting – timetables, programmes, timing and duration of news bulletins, how they were introduced and how terminated, etc. The intrusion would probably take the form of relaying (i.e. picking up and re-transmitting) a German programme from one of their stations [...] and inserting our phoney news item or message at a suitable point. [...] At a later stage, I and one or two of my youngest colleagues were trained for the radio intrusion work itself [...] This involved listening by head phone to a German news bulletin and repeating it concurrently into a mike until the time came to read one of our insertions and then continuing with the official bulletin or, if this has ended, to switch back to the music of the German station. In some ways the task was similar to that of a simultaneous interpreter.[63]

Intrusion operations were enabled by Aspidistra's capacity to take over German wavelengths during breaks, when the programmes had ceased or when the stations went off the air due to RAF raids, as well as tune into wavelengths which were so close to those of the enemy that listeners

[62] The relationship between the radio and modernism is well-documented. See, for example, Debra Rae Cohen, Michael Coyle and Jane Lewty (eds.), *Broadcasting Modernism* (Gainesville, FL: University Press of Florida, 2009) and Todd Avery, *Radio Modernism: Literature, Ethics, and the BBC, 1922–1938* (London: Routledge, 2006).
[63] Account of Service in Black Radio Propaganda by Peter W., pp. 3-4.

would not notice the difference.[64] The intruded material 'would be of such a kind that the Doctor [Goebbels] would be forced to deny it whether as an unauthorised error or as an enemy fraud', with either resulting in a desirable drop in morale.[65] However, Aspidistra was only put into use towards the end of the war because two significant issues remained: figuring out when a German station was going to close down so that Aspidistra could take over – ultimately achieved by closely monitoring the historical correlation between raids and closures – and finding a 'war winning' topic (*BB*, 197).

Following Churchill's indignation at finding out that the BBC was asking German civilians to stay at home in the event of an Allied invasion, the PWE was finally allowed to use Aspidistra to intrude on regional radio stations with instructions that they should flee with the aim of causing confusion among the population and possibly hampering the advance of Nazi troops (*BB*, 200-4). But Delmer's ambition did not stop at wireless intrusion. If enemy broadcasts could be counterfeited, may it not be possible to fabricate the Hell-Schreiber news themselves? To do this, he developed the 'Helga technique' which would allow PWE propagandists to 'transmit a special announcement at a time when the enemy transmitters were idling, or carry on when they had closed down with the item of counterfeit news which it was desirable to circulate'; Peter W. was not aware of this technique having been put into practice, though this does not necessarily mean that it was not.[66] Managerial discussions concerning intrusion operations, however, highlighted the fear that the Germans might be able to counterfeit British radio; to prevent this, the BBC started the practice of naming its newsreaders.[67]

Wireless intrusion was not restricted to civilian propaganda. Indeed, it was also adopted for defensive purposes in military operations. From late 1943, for example, 'Operation Dartboard' used Aspidistra to interrupt the instructions issued over the air to German bombers:

> Since Aspidistra could alter its wave-length with the minimum of delay and at the same time was more powerful than the *Luftwaffe*'s ground control transmitters, the German nightfighter pilots were obliged to listen to the *Soldatensender*. Various other "tricks" were employed to confuse them, e.g. recording the *Luftwaffe*'s ground control instructions on, say, a Monday and re-broadcasting them the following day and hence sending the nightfighter pilots in the wrong direction (*BG*, 187).

In an oral history preserved at the IWM, HK Robin recounts an even more intriguing experiment with voice intrusion: the 'muddled voices' project.[68] The Air Ministry consulted Dr. MacCurdy,

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[64] Garnett, p. 246.
[65] FO 898/44, Minutes of Meetings, Correspondence and Memoranda on Policy. 1941-45. Allied Propaganda in World War II: The Complete Record of the Political Warfare Executive (FO 898). TNA, UK. *Archives Unbound.* Web. 15 Sep. 2020.
[66] Garnett, p. 288; Account of Service in Black Radio Propaganda by Peter W., p. 8.
[67] Crisell, p. 100.
[68] Oral History Interview, Harold Kilner Robin interviewed by Ellic Howe, 1981.

psychological adviser to the PWE (see Chapter 2), on what form of modulation could be put on Aspidistra to disrupt the reception of fighter command signals in Germany. Taking recordings of one of the German voices and recording it several times over with time difference so that the voices would overlap, MacCurdy made whole discs which could then be broadcast whenever British bombers were being attacked. As a consequence of the psycho-acoustical effects, it was anticipated that, on listening to such recordings, the brains of German bombers would become overloaded with information, which would result in the temporary interruption of the air attack. Such instrumentalisation of voice interference poignantly resonates with Spark's subsequent fiction, as the following sections will demonstrate.

2.2 Resisting the Mass Appeal of the Wireless: *The Girls of Slender Means*

Spark's most aural novel, *The Girls of Slender Means,* is set against the backdrop of a cacophony of sounds and voices interfering with each other within the enclosed setting of the May of Teck Club, a London hostel for working girls inspired by the Helena Club where Spark stayed during her leave from Milton Bryan. Set in wartime London, the novel follows the daily joys and troubles of the May of Teck Club residents – including Jane, an overweight publishing girl; Joanna, a fervent elocution teacher; and Selina, a beautiful but relentlessly materialistic girl – and their regular visitor Nicholas Farringdon, an intelligence officer and aspiring writer who eventually becomes a missionary. Jane becomes acquainted with Nicholas when she is entrusted with considering his novel for publication, and soon introduces him to the other members of the Club. Jane, who often works from her room, is described as 'rather tyrannous about her brain-work', often 'ma[king] a fuss about other people's wirelesses on the landing, and about the petty-mindedness of these haggling bouts [about Anne's Schiaparelli] taffeta dress', which is shared in exchange for rationing coupons (*GSM*, 24). Jane's 'brain work' requires concentration because, like a receiving set, she must tune into the right frequency to pick up and decode meaningful messages, just as writer Christine Brooke-Rose picked up signals out of the air at Bletchley Park. In fact, her most creative ideas for grooming Nicholas for publication often get '[i]nspired by a brain-wave' (*GSM*, 30).

In contrast, Joanna resembles a constantly functioning wireless set insofar as she enacts her presence through her acousmatic voice and, in the process, 'forget[s] herself and her personality' (*GSM*, 91). Joanna's poetic voice, as free floating as broadcasting wireless waves, not only 'add[s] tone and style to the establishment' but becomes 'the accepted taste of the club', acting as a repository of aesthetic and spiritual authority (*GSM*, 5). Although her elocution lessons have the practical aim of helping the girls to achieve social mobility, they remain mainly a source of pleasure for the many eavesdroppers who tune into them within the establishment. The residents are particularly fond of Joanna's recitation of Gerard Manley Hopkins' 'The Wreck of the Deutschland', a poem which functions in the text analeptically, foretelling the novel's tragedy. Just like the five Catholic nuns that were driven away from Germany because of their faith drowned when the SS Deutschland wrecked, Joanna – the disembodied spirit of the May of Teck Club – will perish in a fire caused by a previously dormant wartime bomb after ruthless Selina, who had been safely evacuated, returns to rescue the Schiaparelli dress. It is precisely Nicholas' witnessing of Selina's callousness in the face of her fellow residents' suffering which drives him to religious conversion. As Nicholas remarks in his manuscript, 'a vision of evil may be as effective to conversion as a vision of good' (*GSM*, 115).

Although overall, the wireless remains a latent presence in the novel, the intrusion of Churchill's wireless voice on Joanna's poetic elocution brings it to the fore in a crucial passage which sits at the heart of the novel:

> [O]ne wireless, and another, roared forth louder by far than usual from the upper floors; others tuned in to the chorus, justified in the din by the voice of Winston Churchill. Joanna ceased. The wireless spoke forth their simultaneous Sinaitic predictions of what fate would befall the freedom-loving electorate should it vote for Labour in the forthcoming elections. The wirelesses suddenly started to speak humbly:
>
> We shall have Civil Servants . . .
>
> The wirelesses changed their tones, they roared:
>
> No longer civil . . .
>
> Then they were sad and slow:
>
> No longer . . .
>
> . . . *servants*.
>
> Nicholas imagined Joanna standing by her bed, put out of business as it were, but listening, drawing it into her bloodstream. [...] He thought of Joanna in this immovable attitude, given up to the cadences of the wireless as if it did not matter what was producing them, the politician or herself (*GSM*, 69).

In her reading of this passage, Amy Woodbury Tease argues that Joanna's voice is made redundant by the wireless, signifying 'the failure of the May of Teck Club to maintain its relevance in the postwar world'.[69] Such a view appears supported by the personification of the wireless, which is presented as an affective medium, capable of conveying a wide repertoire of emotional tones. However, I suggest that Woodbury Tease's emphasis on the nostalgic obliteration of oral cultures misses a significant layer of meaning, emerging from Spark's fictional

[69] Woodbury Tease, 'Call and Answer', p. 85.

deployment of wireless intrusion to expose both discourses as inadequate and warn against individual thoughtlessness when listening to the wireless as part of the mass.

Both Joanna's reading of Lord Byron's 'The Isles of Greece' and Churchill's wireless speech advocate liberal values such as national freedom in what appears to be a deliberate choice rather than a coincidence. But while Byron's poetry belongs in the aesthetic realm, Churchill's 'crazy broadcast' is depicted as a controversial piece of political propaganda for mass persuasion.[70] Mirroring a PWE wireless intrusion insofar as it takes over Joanna's poetic wavelength, Churchill's voice describes the Labour party as an authoritarian machine, which will not hesitate to use the methods of the Gestapo to limit personal freedom. Criticised as extravagant and ill-advised at the time, Churchill's speech evoked the possibility of a Soviet-like Britain in the hope of moving Liberal voters to support his 'national' cause. Neither Joanna's nor Churchill's voice, Spark suggests, can elicit critical thinking. When facing the threat of the fire, Joanna's recitations prove temporarily comforting to the other confined girls, who 'automatically listening to Joanna's voice as they had always done, were possibly less frantic and trembled less, because of it', but are ultimately grasped unreflectively and prove unable to avert the catastrophe. Yet if Joanna's voice proves impractical, eventually vanishing from the world without a trace, Churchill's empty political rhetoric is no better substitute. Nicholas' vision of Joanna as 'put out of business' yet still receptive to the 'cadences of the wireless', enchanted by a medium which conveys a comically inadequate message, provides a powerful warning about the dangerous effect of unconscious individual surrender to a wireless voice seeking to 'retribalize mankind'.[71] However, Spark is careful to avoid equating the wireless voice with political coercion. Instead, like Brecht and Benjamin, she believes that the medium's ability to showcase a plurality of voices can elicit democratic engagement, as we will see in her short story 'The First Year of My Life' later in this chapter.

If the interference of Churchill's voice with that of Joanna mirrors a PWE intrusion operation, the drowned weeping of Tilly, the wife of Jane's employer George, on getting stuck in the lavatory window evokes the wartime jamming of radio stations:

> 'George, I want George,' Tilly wailed thinly from far above. Then someone on the top floor thoughtfully turned on the wireless to all-drowning pitch:
>
> There were angels dining at the Ritz
>
> And a nightingale sang in Berkeley Square.

[70] For an excellent analysis of Churchill's speech in the context of the post-war British political landscape, see Richard Toye, 'Winston Churchill's "Crazy Broadcast": Party, Nation, and the 1945 Gestapo Speech', *Journal of British Studies*, 49 (2010), 655-80.
[71] Marshall McLuhan, *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1994), p. 304.

And Tilly could be heard no more (*GSM*, 90).

Jamming was a method commonly employed by authoritarian governments to censor enemy views and prevent citizens from engaging with their propaganda. The popularity of *Soldatensender Calais* often made it the target of German jamming, though according to an intercepted report from the Bavarian Ministry of Interior, such jamming efforts had a negative effect on German stations and were even believed to originate from Britain (*BB*, 115). In *The Girls of Slender Means*, Tilly's anxious voice is censored and replaced with popular music, which was in fact widely used in propaganda broadcasting to bring in new audiences and elicit emotional responses. Significantly, the loud wireless voice supplanting Tilly's is perceived differently by the senior and junior residents of the Club; Greggie, a senior resident, complains that 'it looks so vulgar, so bad...', but Jane retorts that she 'mean[s] it sounds so vulgar, so bad' (*GSM*, 90). Whereas the old generation relies on visuality as the primary source of knowledge, Jane heralds a new 'aural' age of 'plural, permeated space', where auditory subjectivity is oriented towards 'openness, responsiveness and acknowledgement of the world rather than violent alienation from it'.[72]

Auditory experience, however, remains transitory unless preserved in recorded form. According to HK Robin, after PWE recordings had been broadcast, the discs were scratched all the way across and wiped so that they would become unusable, most likely for security reasons.[73] A similar fate befalls Joanna's voice by the end of *The Girls of Slender Means*. Following the loss of her body, buried among the rubble of the May of Teck Club, Joanna's poetic voice is also permanently wiped out when Nicholas' recording of her recitations gets accidentally 'erased for economy reasons, so that the tape could be used again' (*GSM*, 107). Joanna's death, which ironically reunites her body with her voice, highlights the precarious nature of the wireless voice, whose revelations remain at perpetual risk of vanishing into thin air.

2.3 The Democratic Potential of the Wireless: 'The First Year of My Life'

In 'The First Year of My Life', a baby is born in 1918 with the power of omniscience, being able to 'tune in' and 'switch on' to various frequencies purveying the sounds of war and the speech of contemporary personalities. The baby explains that this is a power all babies share during the first year of their lives before they are compelled 'to be of use to [their environment] in a practical way' (FYML, 430). Such a free-floating consciousness reflects early utopian views of the wireless

[72] Steven Connor, 'The Modern Auditory I', in *Rewriting the Self: Histories from the Middle Ages to the Present*, ed. by Roy Porter (London: Routledge, 1997), pp. 203-23 (p. 219).
[73] Oral History Interview, Harold Kilner Robin interviewed by Ellic Howe, 1981.

as an instrument capable of transcending geographical distance, though as Jeffrey Sconce argues, it also hints at a more troublesome dimension:

> Through news of distant wars and disasters [...] wireless collapsed the previously unambiguous and safe boundaries that divided individuals from a larger world of trouble. [...] Boundaries of time, space, nation, and body no longer seemed to apply, and although this provided a giddy sense of liberation for some, it also threatened the security and stability of an older social order in which body and mind had been for the most part coterminous.[74]

The baby's aural journey in fact constitutes a harrowing experience. Tuning into the Western front, she encounters 'sheer blood, mud, dismembered bodies, blistered crashes, hectic flashes of light in the night skies, explosions, total terror' (FYML, 432). Furthermore, the war threatens to seep into the home, where the baby hears her gassed uncle 'cough[ing] from deep within his lungs, never to recover but destined to return to the Front' (FYML, 434). Since the voices of the celebrities of the age appear to have a soporific effect on the baby, she expresses a preference for 'the Western Front where one got the true state of affairs' (FYML, 434). In such a climate, there is no wonder that the baby fiercely refuses to smile despite the endless insistence of her relatives.

At the beginning of the story, the baby is shocked to learn that 'those black-dressed people, female of the species to which I appeared to belong [...] had lost their sons' (FYML, 431). Unaware of the polysemy of the verb 'lose', the baby cannot fathom why these women do not just 'go and find their sons' (FYML, 431). For the object-focused baby, unacquainted with social behaviour, this predicament resembles that which befalls 'the special pin for [her] nappies which [her] mother or some other hoverer [sic] dedicated to [her] care was always losing' (FYML, 431). Yet the baby's omniscience progressively succeeds in bringing her into an interconnected ether of alternative thoughts and feelings, which provide a corrective to her initially self-centred perspective. For example, having witnessed the horror of the Western front, the baby is able to discern the disingenuous nature of Marshal Foch's battle cry – "*Tout le monde à la bataille!*" – which did not contemplate the discharge of disabled combatants such as her gassed uncle. In what follows, I suggest that the wireless voice here functions as a 'voice of conscience', whose encounter with the world is instrumental for moving the baby from selfishness to ethical awareness.[75]

[74] Sconce, p. 63.

[75] In *The Life of the Mind*, Arendt departs from Heidegger's empirical 'call of conscience' – understood as a liberation from the social rules which make existence inauthentic – and draws on Socrates' conceptualisation of thinking as a 'two-in-one' to present conscience as a side effect of the thinking process whereby individuals seek to be in agreement with themselves. See Mika Ojakangas, *The Voice of Conscience: A Political Genealogy of Western Ethical Experience* (London: Bloomsbury, 2013), pp. 11-28.

The baby appears to reach critical maturity on the day of her first birthday, when the overhearing of a domestic political conversation intruding on her wavelength brings about a much anticipated, yet ironic reaction:

> "What Asquith told the House of Commons just after the war," said that stout gentleman with his backside to the fire, "- so apt, what Asquith said. He said that the war has cleansed and purged the world, by God! I recall his actual words: "All things have become new. In this great cleansing and purging it has been the privilege of our country to play her part...”'
>
> That did it. I broke into a decided smile and everyone noticed it, convinced that it was provoked by the fact that my brother had blown out the candle on the cake (FYML, 438).

Although mistaken for a happy smile by her guests, the baby's gesture is in fact satirical, mocking the hollow political language which shrouds human suffering in national heroism for the purpose of self-promotion. Written only five years after Spark's essay 'The Desegregation of Art', 'The First Year of My Life' illustrates Spark's critique of sentimental literature and her advocacy of 'a more deliberate cunning, a more derisive undermining of what is wrong'; in the face of absurdity, Spark suggests, the best response may be 'to break up into helpless laughter' (DA, 35). By ridiculing H. H. Asquith, the omniscient baby, who has developed a knowing consciousness through her wireless travelling, reveals the reverse journey of the Liberal politician, whose speech, ironically described as 'so apt' demonstrates the inadequacy of political appeals to patriotism acting as substitutes for public accountability. Unlike Asquith, who is shown to bend reality to fit into his single-minded patriotic perspective, the baby's wireless network – her 'voice of conscience' – endlessly explores different perspectives and never settles on any one object; instead, like Arendt's 'two-in-one' thinking, it is a dialogic voice that remains open to the world, thus encouraging critical thinking and ethical judgement (see Chapter 2). PWE broadcasting to Germany had a comparable aim. By disseminating views intended to elicit doubt in German citizens, PWE propagandists hoped that they would eventually be moved to challenge, rather than comply with, the tenets of Nazism.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have argued that Spark adopts the fictional equivalent of PWE scrambled telephony and intrusion operations as part of her experimentation with an aesthetics of interruption which seeks to foreground hitherto concealed aspects of experience. In doing so, I have also suggested that both the PWE and Spark – through propaganda and fiction, respectively – seek to encourage scepticism and critical thinking in the hope of eliciting democratic debate. As her 'scrambler novels' of the 1970s demonstrate, Spark regards telephonic disconnection as meaningful because it acts as an epistemological tool which helps characters to dismantle illusory or absurd representations of social or political realities. By alienating the characters from their usual circumstances and deeply held beliefs, Spark's Brechtian-inspired aesthetics of interruption, deployed via scrambled telephony, encourages characters to notice alternative perspectives. *The Hothouse by the East River* depicts Elsa's scrambling of the line as a call for reality confronting Paul's hallucinatory New York, which allows the expression of her ontological doubts and leads to the couple's joint acceptance of death. Similarly, *The Abbess of Crewe* draws on Gertrude's disruption of the line to mock the absurd foundation of Abbess Alexandra's electronic surveillance, which is based on dubious political suspicion rather than real threat. Finally, *The Takeover* adopts telephonic disconnection to expose Anthea's reliance on a far-fetched fiction, supported by fabricated material evidence of her son's presumed professional success, at the expense of the truth. The PWE used telephone scrambling as passive noise which would prevent unwanted intrusion into confidential communications, but such intelligence gathering aimed to move Germans to recognise the fanciful gaps in Nazi discourse and to challenge them. I have suggested that Spark's 'scrambler novels' of the 1970s behave in a similar manner, as telephony is endowed with radical potential for inverting power relations and challenging the status quo in tightly controlled environments.

For Spark, such radical potential is also shared by the wireless. In contrast to the unanimous wireless sets broadcasting Churchill's voice in *The Girls of Slender Means* which, in Nicholas' imagination, overwhelm Joanna with the lethargic cadences of their acousmatic voices and pose the risk of leading her to inadvertently accept their message, the political speech targeting the baby as individual, rather than as a member of the mass, does not move her to passive conformity, but to satirical resistance. If *The Girls of Slender Means* provides a warning about the totalitarian potential of the wireless, as theorised by Adorno, 'The First Year of My Life' presents a more optimistic view of the medium as a vehicle for educating listeners on the need for dialogic perspectives as prerequisite for adopting a more ethically conscious orientation. Spark's turn from a totalitarian to a liberating wireless may have been influenced by her essayistic reflection on the role of literature in 'The Desegregation of Art', as well as her fictional experimentation with an aesthetics of interruption during the 1970s. Although Spark is not usually regarded as a political writer, the association between the wireless and politics is at the centre of both *The Girls of Slender Means* and 'The First Year of My Life'. Significantly, both Churchill and Asquith seem to practice the art of disinformation, albeit seemingly with less honourable reasons than the PWE. By adopting wireless intrusion as a fictional method, Spark encourages conscious attention to the political message emerging from the wireless set with the aim of prompting readers to resist and challenge distorted versions of reality wherever they may find them.

4. Propaganda and Literary Forgery: The Anarchic Creativity of Impostorship and Displaced Authorship

Introduction

In Muriel Spark's poem 'Authors' Ghosts' (2003), the ghosts of dead writers return nightly from their graves to torment readers with textual alterations. Posing a challenge to the notion of authenticity, they 'put final, semi-final touches, / Sometimes whole paragraphs. / Whole pages are added, re-written, revised' (AG, 15). Such changes, the narrator concludes, must surely account for their uneven textual recollection throughout the years: 'I don't remember this... Where / Did this ending come from? / I recall quite another' (AG, 15). By questioning the capacity of memory for ascertaining authenticity, the poem momentarily hints at the possibility that the act of rehearsing the memory of a text may make it susceptible to change – what psychologists have termed 'retrieval-enhanced suggestibility'.[1] However, this rational explanation based on reader-response is eventually discarded in favour of the supernatural resurrection of the author. Indeed, the narrator shows no doubt that the text 'has been tampered with' because '[t]he author's very touch is here, there and there, / Where it wasn't before' (AG, 15). For the narrator, a writer's own style is an indelible mark linking a text with its author, thereby acting as guarantor of textual authenticity. In this late poem, Spark provides a final reflection on the precarious nature of authenticity, which remains perpetually haunted by the prospect of forgery – a central theme in her life and work even before she became a novelist.

Spark's preoccupation with the vulnerability of written discourse can be traced back to classical antiquity. In the *Phaedrus*, Plato advocated the superiority of oral discourse over written discourse because the physical presence of its author would guarantee accurate interpretation and author accountability. Oral discourse was therefore prized for its reliance on performance as signature.[2] In contrast, Plato worried about the possibility that textual records may become subject to misinterpretation and misappropriation due to their inalienable separation from their authors:

> Once any account has been written down, you find it all over the place, hobnobbing with completely inappropriate people no less than with those who understand it, and completely failing to know who it should and shouldn't talk to. And faced with rudeness and unfair abuse it always needs its father to come to its assistance, since it is incapable of defending or helping itself.[3]

[1] See Jason C. K. Chan et al., 'Retrieval-Enhanced Suggestibility: A Retrospective and a New Investigation', *Journal of Applied Research in Memory and Cognition*, 6 (2017), 213-29.
[2] Seán Burke, 'The Ethics of Signature', in *Authorship: From Plato to the Postmodern: A Reader*, ed. by Seán Burke (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1995), pp. 285-91 (p. 285).
[3] Plato, *Phaedrus*, trans. by Robin Waterfield (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 275e.

Notwithstanding Plato's elitist wish to restrict textual circulation, Spark shares his concern with the orphan status of the written word, which can potentially make it prey to distortion by interested parties. However, according to Seán Burke, the textual signature can assuage such a fear because it establishes an ethical channel of enquiry and responsibility which links the author to the text in such a way that the author must necessarily remain accountable for their creation.[4] Spark's interest in this notion of authorial responsibility was most likely foregrounded by her biographical research on Mary Shelley, a writer who famously described her novel *Frankenstein* (1818) as her 'hideous progeny', exhibiting anxiety about the filial relationship between author and text.[5]

A meticulous biographer, Spark was particularly troubled by the dissemination of untruthful records of her life and work to scholars and set out to write her own autobiography, *Curriculum Vitae*, in an attempt to 'put the record straight' and bypass the 'personal damage', as well as 'the damage done to truth and to scholarship', caused by her subjection to 'irresponsible reportage' (*CV*, 11-2). Spark is here launching a veiled accusation against her former lover and collaborator Derek Stanford, whose early biographical study of Spark incorporated several factual inaccuracies.[6] Stanford was also vengefully fictionalised as *pisseur de copie* Hector Bartlett, who engages in misquotation and eventually commits outright forgery with serious consequences, in Spark's *A Far Cry from Kensington*. In her autobiography, Spark reveals her reverence for facts in the writing of non-fiction and her desire to avoid the perilous effects of even well-intentioned lies on personal and professional reputations.[7] She views accuracy as the primary mark of good scholarship and pursues it in her early biographies of Romantic writers, which incorporate extensive quotations from personal journals, as well as in her own autobiography, which claims to be supported solely 'by documentary evidence or by eyewitnesses' (*CV*, 11). For Spark, misleading facts have no place in textual records that aim to make truth claims. Fictional forgery, however, is a different story.

According to Nicholas Groom, counterfeit, forgery and plagiarism are related yet distinct concepts. Unlike a counterfeit, which is simply 'a facsimile copy [...] of a pre-existent work', a forgery 'belongs to a recognizable oeuvre [...] or a recognizable scholarly field or taxonomy, but

[4] Burke, p. 290.
[5] See Muriel Spark, *Mary Shelley* (Manchester: Carcanet, 2013), originally published as *Child of Light: A Reassessment of Mary Shelley* (Hadleigh, Essex: Tower Bridge Publications, 1951); Mary Shelley, 'Introduction to *Frankenstein*, Third Edition (1831)', in *Frankenstein*, ed. by J. Paul Hunter (New York: Norton, 2012), pp. 131-3 (p. 133).
[6] See Derek Stanford, *Muriel Spark: A Biographical and Critical Study* (Fontwell, Sussex: Centaur Press, 1963).
[7] In the Introduction to *Curriculum Vitae*, Spark takes issue with a biographer who 'showed [her] to be a flourishing hostess at a time when [she] was little known' and 'to have among [her] "guests" two notable people who at that time [she] did not know.' When Spark expressed her objections, the biographer was bewildered because they felt they had portrayed Spark in 'a "good" light' (*CV*, 12).

it presents itself as a contribution to that discourse, rather than as a repetition'.[8] Plagiarism, on the other hand, is based 'on the inability of the reader or viewer to recognize any source'.[9] Although forgeries have traditionally been perceived as 'bastard works [which] steal or mimic' the authority of an original text, most forgeries are not mere copies, but works whose authority is derived precisely from the creative subversion of 'the cult of the original'.[10] The 18th century witnessed the emergence of the concept of originality – understood as artistic creation originating from an author's genius – alongside the rise of private property and individuality. The first Copyright Act, passed in 1710, in fact aimed to help booksellers protect the commercial value of their textual investments.[11] By the Romantic period, however, anxieties about originality had become prominent among authors themselves, who exhibited 'fears that the sacred well of individual genius [may] be poisoned or simply drawn dry by intruders'.[12] Such anxieties, Groom notes, evidence a shift from the neo-classical understanding of artistic creation as material craft to the Romantic view of artistic brilliance as emanating from the authorial mind itself.[13] Unsurprisingly, the Romantic drive to safeguard originality coincided with the golden age of forgery, heralded by writers such as Thomas Chatterton and James Macpherson.

By the 20th century, 'both the modernist revival of literary allusiveness and the postmodernist practice of textual appropriation [had] created conditions highly favourable to literary forgery'.[14] Such conditions had originated from the dismissal of two myths – the myth of the author as the 'sacred source' of a work and the myth of originality – which led to the realisation that, even when using their imagination, 'the writer […] is merely imitating, parodying, mimicking, repeating, replaying, plagiarizing in other words, not the absolute meaning that supposedly precedes the creative act, but the very medium that constitutes the work of art'.[15] By virtue of its own self-referentiality, postmodern fiction seeks to foreground the fact that, in Derrida's words, '*[t]here is nothing outside of the text*'.[16] Given that post-structuralism, and in particular, the authorship debate of the 1960s, had strived precisely to kill once and for all the Romantic notion of the author as source of originality, Spark's desire to resurrect the author, as

8 Nick Groom, *The Forger's Shadow: How Forgery Changed the Course of Literature* (London: Picador, 2002), pp. 16-7.
9 Groom, p. 17.
10 Ian Haywood, *Faking It: Art and the Politics of Forgery* (Brighton: The Harvester Press, 1987), p. 10.
11 K. K. Ruthven, *Faking Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), p. 56.
12 Groom, p. 27.
13 Groom, pp. 37-8.
14 Groom, p. 125.
15 Raymond Federman, *Critifiction: Postmodern Essays* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1993), pp. 56-8.
16 Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, trans. by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (Baltimore, MA: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998), p. 158.

testified by 'Authors' Ghosts', appears surprising and serves to complicate, to a certain extent, her categorisation as a postmodern novelist.

Both Roland Barthes and Michel Foucault sought to liberate the text from the constraint of authorship, which they perceived as a dangerous universalizing subjectivity aiming to limit textual meaning. In 'The Death of the Author' (1968), Roland Barthes in fact describes the author as a 'scriptor' who does not precede but 'is born simultaneously with the text'.[17] No longer the originator of a text's brilliance, the scriptor solely rearranges material from literary tradition into a text which is held together by the figure of the reader. As a result, the reader replaces the author as creator of meaning, or, in Barthes' renowned phrase, 'the birth of the reader must be at the cost of the death of the Author'.[18] Michel Foucault goes ever further than Barthes in his depersonalization of the author. In 'What is an Author?' (1969), Foucault reduces the author to an 'author function', defined as 'a certain discursive set' which holds status 'within a society and a culture'.[19] This author function does not simply emerge from authorial attribution, but is assigned retrospectively through critical appraisal, conceptual coherence, stylistic unity, and historical contextualization of the multiple discursive examples which form an author's canon.[20] As a result, the author function acts as a limit to the potential circulation and signification of the text, a role which Foucault perceives as characteristic of 'our era of industrial and bourgeois society, of individualism and private property'.[21]

Influenced by Barthes and Foucault, postmodernism abandons the Romantic concept of originality as creation out of nothing and conceptualises the author as re-arranger, rather than originator, of textual fragments. In doing so, it portrays representations of both the genuine and the spurious as equal cultural constructs which have been set against each other by the literary establishment with the aim of limiting the anarchic creativity of texts. Spark's movement from poetry and biography to fiction writing in fact marked the beginning of her experimentation with competing textual representations. Such a development is characteristic of postmodern fiction, which deliberately prevents 'unproblematic referential readings' due to its 'loss of faith in representational practices'.[22] However, despite being described as a postmodern author, Spark refuses to unequivocally dispense with the notion of authorship. Instead, Spark wishes to retain

[17] Roland Barthes, 'The Death of the Author', in *Image, Music, Text*, ed. by Stephen Heath (London: Fontana, 1977), pp. 142-8 (p. 145).
[18] Barthes, 'Death of the Author', p. 148.
[19] Michel Foucault, 'What is an Author?', in *Essential Works of Foucault, 1954-1984, Volume II: Aesthetics, Method and Epistemology*, ed. by James D. Faubion (New York: The New Press, 1998), pp. 205-22 (p. 211).
[20] Foucault, 'What is an Author?', pp. 213-4.
[21] Foucault, 'What is an Author?', p. 222.
[22] Hans Bertens, 'Postmodern Authorship', in *The Cambridge Handbook of Literary Authorship*, ed. by Ingo Berensmeyer, Gert Buelens and Marysa Demoor (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019), pp. 183-200 (p. 196).

the notion of authorship – primarily as a marker of style and a channel of ethical accountability – whilst drawing attention to the manifold ways in which the original source of textual discourses can be displaced. In doing so, she emphasises the resulting difficulties in distinguishing the genuine from the spurious, particularly when confronted with expert textual manipulation.

This chapter suggests that Spark's work for the PWE may have influenced the development of such a view. Spark also shows awareness of the existence of gradations of forgery, showing derision towards the notion of forgery-as-theft, embodied in the aforementioned figure of Hector Bartlett, but embracing forgery-as-creativity. Whereas forgery-as-theft is presented as a crime against the authorial imagination with the sole purpose of selfishly seeking financial gain, forgery-as-creativity is presented as an uplifting and productive act of mimicry that aims for the provision of new, transformative meanings. Spark's interest in this latter form of textual manipulation was evident from her childhood, when she would 'write letters to herself from boy friends, and hide them down the sofa so her mother would find them. She'd think they were real and be horrified'.[23] I argue that Spark's work for the PWE would have sharpened her awareness of the radical potential of creative forgeries such as black propaganda printed materials to act as 'a weapon in the arsenal of devices for discrediting political opponents' by providing enemy readers with alternative perspectives in the expectation that they would be unwittingly moved to advance the Allied cause.[24] However, unlike fiction, PWE printed materials sought to foster a narrow interpretation of textual evidence, and the obscure nature of their authorship enabled the preservation of anonymity – described by Burke as Plato's nightmare – which led to the disabling of ethical accountability.[25] As Susan Stewart puts it, 'a forger […] makes a claim for the authenticity of a document rather than for the authenticity of himself or herself as a site of production'.[26] As a result, the reader, rather than the author, becomes responsible for authenticating the text based on the extent to which it appears plausible. I contend that Spark's involvement in PWE propaganda enhanced her understanding of the distinction between art and propaganda in relation to authorship; the artist must necessarily remain accountable for their creation whereas the propagandist does not. In fact, forgeries devalue the identity of the propagandist, who, much like the postmodern author, does not appear to matter at all.

[23] Hamilton, p. 10.
[24] Ruthven, p. 189.
[25] Burke, p. 290.
[26] Susan Stewart, *Crimes of Writing: Problems in the Containment of Representation* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1994), p. 24.

1. PWE Forgeries

The history of covert British forgery during the Second World War can be traced back to the foundation of the Letter Writing Unit in early 1941. Under the leadership of Leonard Ingrams, an undersecretary at the Ministry of Economic Warfare, the Unit's role was 'to create and disseminate propaganda material using the international postal system'.[27] It was responsible for designing letters intended to elicit financial and commercial unrest in France and Germany. One of the letters, for example, warned members of the savings bank association that large withdrawals were being made from deposit accounts so that they would grow concerned and withdraw their money, and another encouraged hotel managers to collect sewage fat for the production of margarine with the intention of causing food neurosis.[28] However, the Unit was only able to carry out small-scale operations before the arrival of typographer and printer Ellic Howe. In the summer of 1941, Howe was serving as a Sergeant-Major at Anti-Aircraft Command Headquarters. Convinced that his printing skills could be put to good use in the war effort, Howe wrote a paper on the use of forgery in wartime – 'The Documentary Weapon' – which found its way on to the desk of Ingrams. Impressed by Howe's paper, Ingrams called him in for a meeting, and promptly appointed Howe as the PWE's print production manager in November 1941.[29]

Howe's paper argued that written communication is superior to oral communication since 'people will generally consider any piece of writing, set up in the style to which they are accustomed, as valid, genuine and delivered in good faith'.[30] In addition, written discourse could address individuals who may be 'outside the reach of our armoured divisions or agents'.[31] Howe emphasised that the success of printed materials depended on the ability of these to appear plausible to their recipients:

> [T]he writer is not primarily concerned with the literary or verbal contents of any document, except in so far as they control format, layout and design; nor in the manner of the document's "planting" or use, except in so much that the document must not betray its bearer.[32]

Such plausibility can only be achieved through expert knowledge of documentary conventions – 'process, format, type face, paper handwriting, "style"' – which would prevent the propagandist from making a mistake that might disclose the document's real provenance.[33] Therefore, the

[27] Richards, *Black Art*, p. 17.
[28] Richards, *Black Art*, pp. 17-8.
[29] Cruickshank, p. 35.
[30] FO 898/61, Policy Meetings and Correspondence. 1941-5. Allied Propaganda in World War II: The Complete Record of the Political Warfare Executive (FO 898). TNA, UK. *Archives Unbound*. Web. 26 Nov. 2020.
[31] FO 898/61, Policy Meetings and Correspondence. 1941-5.
[32] FO 898/61, Policy Meetings and Correspondence. 1941-5.
[33] FO 898/61, Policy Meetings and Correspondence. 1941-5.

documentary intelligence expert must be particularly well versed in 'the essentials of a "National Style" by the examination of large numbers of documents, ranging from books to visiting cards by way of newspapers, income tax forms, letterheadings, handbills, etc.', in order to grasp 'the essence of the enemies stylistic practice'.[34] Howe believed that the reproduction of the enemy's visual aesthetics – i.e. 'National Style' – would enable the PWE to mimic German documents and publications with such a degree of accuracy that even the German authorities would recognise and trust these as genuine. The value of PWE forgeries thus relied on the PWE's ability to simulate, in Foucault's words, the 'author function' of the German government it was trying to defy.[35]

On joining the Letter Writing Unit, Howe had been responsible for several counterfeit projects, such as the production of a *Kennkarte* [German ID card], which he had overall found uninteresting and not particularly challenging (*BG*, 202). However, in early 1942, Howe was introduced to Sefton Delmer, with whom he would develop a fruitful collaboration on the art of creating black forgeries (*BG*, 202-3). 'Mr. Howe's Unit' was to be entrusted with the production of high-quality printed materials – ranging from stickers to full magazines – for sabotaging the enemy and destroying morale, as well as bolstering Allied trust in occupied countries. In particular, the black leaflets produced by Howe and Delmer aimed to

> encourage disobedience of Party instructions, to encourage selfish group loyalties among people determined not to evacuate, but ready to hoard, stay put and help escaping and deserting soldiers. Commitment instructions on behalf of the Party would be useful, denials of enemy reports or assurances by the Party likewise.[36]

In his memoir *The Black Game*, Howe notes that Delmer was not much interested in counterfeits; instead, he prioritised the creation of 'bogus German printed matter, the precondition being that if he could not supply a model I [Howe] would have to design something that "looked German"' (*BG*, 203). In fact, from the approximately 2,000 printed items produced by Howe's team, only 10% were counterfeits; the remainder were creatively forged materials 'purporting to have been printed clandestinely', precisely the kind of forgery that Spark would later cherish in her fiction.[37] About 75% of such output was directed to Germany and the remaining 25% targeted various European countries such as France and Belgium.[38]

Howe's knowledge of European typographical techniques and stylistic conventions quickly became an important asset to the PWE, and particularly, to Delmer's team. In late August

[34] FO 898/61, Policy Meetings and Correspondence. 1941-5.
[35] Foucault, 'What is an Author?', p. 211.
[36] FO 898/208, PWE/SOE Agents' Intelligence Reports. 1944-5. Allied Propaganda in World War II: The Complete Record of the Political Warfare Executive (FO 898). TNA, UK. *Archives Unbound*. Web. 26 Nov. 2020.
[37] Garnett, p. 192.
[38] Garnett, p. 192.

1942, Howe was joined by German graphic artist Elizabeth Friedlander, who took charge of all design work, having a knack for 'invent[ing] something that was completely convincing' in the absence of an original print (*BG*, 204). Assisted by Howe's Unit, the 'PWE went to great lengths to produce exact imitations of the German documents that were to be dropped' so as to evade their exposure as counterfeits; as Howe had advised in 'The Documentary Weapon', careful attention was paid to '[p]aper, ink, type face, layout – all had to be as near the real thing as possible' to enable the successful deception not only of German civilians, but most importantly, of the German authorities themselves.[39] For example, David Garnett claims that the PWE went as far as to manufacture continental perforating machines, as they differed from the British ones and could easily have given away the deception.[40]

Two printing operations – the production of ration cards and malingering booklets – stand out as particularly effective. In *Black Boomerang*, Delmer recalls chancing upon a genuine-looking German 'traveller' ration card which turned out to have been created for the benefit of SOE agents (*BB*, 136). With the permission of the SOE, which simply requested the PWE did not use the most recently issued design, Delmer immediately asked Howe to produce vast amounts of travellers' rations to be dropped over Germany with the aim of sabotaging the German rationing system (*BB*, 136). There is ample archival evidence that German citizens collected and exchanged PWE ration cards for food items; such behaviour must have elicited nervousness from the German authorities, which took to broadcasting warnings about the dangerous consequences of handling these subversive items:

> At the beginning of January, the enemy dropped forged food cards for soldiers on leave […] entitling holders to buy 5,000 grammes of wheatflour, 1,500 grammes of jam, 2,000 grammes of processed foods, 500 g of butter and 1000 g of sugar […] The cards differ considerably from genuine cards and must be surrendered immediately to the police: offenders must expect penal servitude or the death sentence…[41]

According to Delmer, Goebbels in fact backed up such claim by getting 'his own printers to fabricate some monumentally clumsy forgeries of ration cards', which he paraded around Germany with the aim of denigrating British forgeries (*BB*, 137).

The malingering booklet was conceived by the PWE's psychological adviser, Dr. MacCurdy, based on two key rules: German citizens must pose as patriotic citizens who have the misfortune to be unwell against their will, and must avoid naming their disease or volunteering specific symptoms (*BB*, 130). The booklet had a twofold aim: encouraging German citizens to

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[39] Cruickshank, p. 100.
[40] Garnett, p. 191.
[41] FO 898/465, "Black" Leaflet Comebacks: Reports on Reactions to. 1943-5. Allied Propaganda in World War II: The Complete Record of the Political Warfare Executive (FO 898). TNA, UK. *Archives Unbound*. Web. 26 Nov. 2020.

feign illness so that they could escape military service or other wartime duties, and leading doctors to identify cases of malingering where there were none (*BB*, 131). The malingering booklet performed so strongly that it warranted at least twenty editions, which, to prevent reader penalties on being picked up, featured 'deceptively innocent cover design[s]: miniature hymn books for Roman Catholic and Protestant soldiers, Belgian railway timetables, pocket guides to Oslo, short stories by well-known authors and so on' (*BG*, 222). A piece of intelligence on the effectiveness of a propaganda campaign – also known as a 'comeback' – from *Mitteilungen für die Truppe* (No. 358, September 1944), for example, warned of the existence of 'notebooks offering wrinkles on feigning sickness or on self-mutilation […] often in some camouflaged covering, e.g. song-books for soldiers'.[42] Spark would go on to fictionalise the use of harmless covers to disguise propaganda in her debut novel *The Comforters*. Caroline's friend the Baron, an obscure Belgian-Congolese man who owns an intellectual bookshop and is obsessed with black magic, appears to satisfy the requirements of the double agent role. When a customer makes an inquiry about a railway book for children, such association is further highlighted through his family's political connections:

> 'My father,' he said, 'knew a man in the Belgian Diplomatic Service who was the author of a railway book for children. It was very popular and sold quickly. A copy was sent to a family in Yugoslavia. Of course, the book contained a code message. The author was revising the book for the second edition when he was arrested…' (*C*, 48).

Such creation of propaganda purporting to pass as literature evidences the extent to which the latter may be subject to manipulation for the purpose of persuasion.

However, literature was not the only vehicle used by the PWE for the spread of black printed materials. In fact, Howe notes that the malingering booklet was also 'printed as single sheets on very thin Bible paper which were inserted into "Efka" and other cigarette paper packets and in a different and larger format for insertion into a forgery of the envelope for the official Reich lottery tickets' (*BG*, 223). These items could easily be left behind in public spaces in the expectation that civilians would pick them up. The use of forgeries as part of PWE propaganda campaigns brought to the fore the political potential of the spurious text in modern warfare. Since the printed word holds higher authority and is more long-lasting than oral discourse, the production of plausible black matter proved to be a powerful weapon for deception, capable of posing 'a threat to the stability and indeed the economic vitality' of enemy and occupied nations.[43] The German authorities were quick to realise such potential and went as far as to translate the malingering booklet into English for the benefit of the Allied troops (*BB*, 131).

[42] FO 898/465, "Black" Leaflet Comebacks: Reports on Reactions to. 1943-5.
[43] Groom, p. 87.

PWE printed materials generally aimed to feature as much fact as possible in order to appear credible to their readership, so newspapers soon became an important medium for the transmission of propaganda. In fact, a comeback from *Mitteilungen für die Truppe* (No. 358, September 1944) complained that '[n]ot only are spurious editions of "Mitteilungen fuer die Truppe" issued, but the Anglo-Americans publish other apparently innocuous Front papers, cleverly secreting their guile under the cloak of Wehrmacht's communiqués'.[44] In addition, PWE propagandists, not unlike literary forgers, occasionally adopted the 'found manuscript' trope – the suggestion that a manuscript, found by chance, is being innocently brought to the attention of the public – as a means to authenticate bogus documents. For example, Delmer's first commission for Howe – the production of a black booklet entitled 'Europa in Gefahr' [Europe in Danger], which claimed that the Japanese longed for the white races to fight to destruction – purported to have been printed by 'a group of patriotic men who considered it their duty, in spite of the serious political situation, to bring this document, which came into [their] possession by chance, to the notice of the public' (*BG*, 209).

Spark would have been familiar with the anxieties over authenticity that the 'found manuscript' elicits, as they are particularly prominent in Scottish literature and can be traced back to Macpherson's Ossian poems, which contributed to shaping nationalist historiography.[45] In particular, some 19th-century Scottish classic texts such as James Hogg's *The Private Memoirs and Confessions of a Justified Sinner* (1824) and Robert Louis Stevenson's *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* (1886), which influenced Spark's use of the doppelgänger figure, employed this technique. In the 20th century, the 'found manuscript' trope became aligned with postmodern fiction because it replaces 'the idea of authenticity with a focus on the play of textual surfaces', thereby rendering textual indeterminacy as a mystery to be solved by the reader.[46] Spark's Scottish contemporaries such as Alasdair Gray and Emma Tennant explored the postmodern potential of the 'found manuscript' in *Poor Things* (1992), as well as *The Bad Sister* (1978) and *Two Women of London* (1989), respectively. Although Spark does not openly engage with the 'found manuscript' tradition, her fiction still seeks to unsettle clear-cut boundaries between fact and fiction. For example, Spark's 'Note to the Reader' in *Aiding and Abetting* maintains that the facts about 'Lucky' Lucan have been 'absorbed creatively, and metamorphosed into what [she has] written' (*AA*, xvii). Although *Aiding and Abetting* shows limited engagement with textual forgery (with the exception of the leaflet that Beate Pappenheim produces in support

[44] FO 898/465, "Black" Leaflet Comebacks: Reports on Reactions to. 1943-5.
[45] Haywood, p. 50.
[46] Timothy C. Baker, *Contemporary Scottish Gothic: Mourning, Authenticity, and Tradition* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), pp. 54-88 (pp. 77-79).

of her stigmata fraud), it displays a greater concern with another kind of duplicity, namely the use of forged identities as a weapon for deception, as we will see later in this chapter.

Drawing on Spark's understanding of intelligence work at the PWE, which required the creation of counterfeits and forgeries of German documents, this chapter argues that Spark views textual forgery as a source of anarchic creativity capable of sabotaging the authority of the social and political establishment by incorporating subversive content that appears plausible to the reader. Spark does not mention Howe in her autobiography *Curriculum Vitae*, and it is unclear whether their paths ever crossed. Yet Spark is likely to have been acquainted with Howe's work for Delmer, which may have honed her problematization of authenticity and forgery in her subsequent fiction. Through examples from *The Bachelors*, *The Girls of Slender Means*, *Loitering with Intent* and *A Far Cry from Kensington*, I suggest that Spark portrays textual forgeries as 'extreme manifestations of the techniques of fiction', which expose the precarious boundary between the authentic and the spurious document.[47] However, Spark refuses to pursue the postmodern dismissal of authorship; instead, she advocates its significance as an ethical channel of enquiry and accountability linking author to text, particularly in relation to factuality and authorial style. In doing so, she reclaims authorship as the key means to distinguish fiction from propaganda in the post-war period, a time when authenticity was increasingly becoming subject to manipulation as part of the normalisation of disinformation that has given rise to our age of fake news.

2. The Forged Letter and Fraudulent Conversion: *The Bachelors*

In *The Bachelors*, an alleged forged letter acts as the main driving force of the plot. Fraudulent spiritualist Patrick Seton, who holds séances as part of the Wider Infinity Circle, is accused of having forged a letter in which widow Freda Flowers offers him two thousand pounds to further his spiritualist work when, in fact, Freda's cheque was to be invested in bonds on her behalf. Ronald Bridges, an epileptic bachelor working as 'assistant curator at a small museum of handwriting' who has gained 'a reputation in the detection of forgeries' following his consulting and court witnessing in forgery cases, is tasked with evaluating the authenticity of the letter (*B*, 1, 11). Elsie Forrest, a friend of Patrick's girlfriend Alice, pretends to be Ronald's secretary to access his home and steal the letter for Father Socket, but later decides to keep it after learning that Father Socket is a homosexual with no genuine romantic interest in her. Ronald eventually manages to recover the letter from Elsie on the grounds that it will help incriminate Patrick, who Elsie views as a deleterious influence on her friend Alice. However, Ronald's court testimony confirming that the letter is a forgery is counteracted by the testimony of another expert who

[47] Groom, p. 64.

claims it is not, thus rendering the letter worthless. Patrick's conviction is therefore sealed by his previous forgery record rather than by this specific instance of forgery.

Critical appraisals of *The Bachelors* have overwhelmingly insisted on interpreting the novel through a religious lens. Alan Bold, for example, describes it as 'an exposure of the emptiness of spurious religions' such as spiritualism, bachelordom and homosexuality, in which all characters are revealed to be 'in various degrees, frauds'.[48] Similarly, Bryan Cheyette regards the novel as 'overly didactic and moralistic', an example of Spark's struggle to 'represent a Catholic orthodoxy without betraying her imaginative freedom'.[49] Despite the evident spiritualist theme of the novel, I suggest that Spark is primarily interested in using the contradictions surrounding the forged letter to destabilise clear-cut understandings of truth and falsity, embodied in the figures of Ronald Bridges and Patrick Seton, respectively, and to demonstrate that neither science nor religion can ever fully determine authenticity.

Ronald's girlfriend Hildegarde, who infantilises him to the extent that she has taken a short course on graphology to memorise reference books on his behalf, believes that medical records and psychoanalysis are the most suitable means of interpreting Ronald's own handwriting:

> 'The formation of your capital "I's" denotes ear trouble,' she said. 'There are signs, too, in the variations of the angles that you like to have your own way, probably as the result of your mother's early death and the insufficiency of your father's interest in you. The emotional rhythm is irregular, which means that your behaviour is sometimes incomprehensive to those around you.' […] 'And most of all, your handwriting shows that you're a sort of *genius*' (*B*, 14).

Hildegarde's idiosyncratic evaluation of Ronald's handwriting is depicted as absurd. In fact, Spark parodies the long-lasting Romantic conceptualisation of writing as the expression of an author's genius, which appears to have been established according to emotional rather than empirical factors. Indeed, Ronald is quick to take issue with Hildegarde's interpretation because she has not 'tested the results against experience' and subsequently breaks up with her to avoid any further patronising behaviour towards him (*B*, 14).

In contrast to Hildegarde, Ronald adopts scientific methods which are presumed capable of determining with maximum accuracy the authenticity, or lack thereof, of a document. As Ronald's friend Matthew boasts to his love interest Alice,

> 'He puts these documents to all sorts of tests – don't you, Ronald? There's a test for the ink, and the paper, and all the folds. The most important thing is the formation of the letters – anyone can do the rest, but Ronald's the best man for detecting the formation of letters. And sometimes the forger has stopped to assess his handiwork and then retraced. That's fatal because there's an interruption in the writing which

[48] Bold, pp. 59-61.
[49] Cheyette, pp. 49-50.

> can be detected under the microscope, at least Ronald can detect it – can't you, Ronald?' (*B*, 83).

Such an interruption in the formation of letters is perceived to be the result of the forger's self-consciousness about the process of writing, which confirms the fact that 'a forger is in fact often caught because of the "unnatural" relations between himself or herself and the document'.[50] Furthermore, the self-consciousness that leads to implausible writing is also evident in the folds of the paper. Ronald's microscopic examination therefore requires access to the original forged letter, rather than a copy, a matter that becomes problematic after Elsie steals the evidence. As Ronald explains,

> Sometimes a line has been inked over after the fold has been made. The forger very often has second thoughts about the job after the paper has been folded, and to make everything perfect he unfolds the paper again and he touches something up; let's say the stroke of an "f". It's possible to see under the microscope if that sort of thing has been done (*B*, 181).

Although Ronald's forgery detection is based on the examination of variations in handwriting, a question that might appear to have little relevance for PWE propagandists largely producing printed materials, his concern with stylistic plausibility resonates with the work of 'Mr. Howe's Unit'. For example, Howe disliked the standard method for creating counterfeits, which involved 'the longwinded and meticulous retouching of enlarged photographic copies', favouring instead the production of 'a document from scratch utilising the correct *Fraktur* typefaces of the original' to avoid detection.[51] Howe and Ronald in fact carry out opposing roles. While Howe instructs PWE propagandists on the stylistic matters that must be considered to make a document seem plausible, Ronald is responsible for tracing the mistakes that give away the falsity of documentary evidence.

Patrick's alleged forged letter appears plausible to Elsie's untrained eye because its writing looks like 'a woman's writing' (*B*, 181). In fact, Patrick's preying on gullible Freda under the pretence of having romantic feelings for her does not appear to be an isolated occurrence, as testified by his criminal record for forgery. Patrick's gift seems to be his persuasiveness; in the words of Freda, he is a smooth talker – 'a poet at heart' – who 'could look you in the eyes […] and tell a lie so that you would believe you were telling the lie, not him' (*B*, 59, 157). In other words, Patrick employs 'gaslighting' – psychological abuse which makes victims doubt their sense of reality – in order to efface his criminal role.[52] As Paige L. Sweet notes, gaslighting is a gendered phenomenon rooted in the association of women with irrationality and most often takes

[50] Stewart, *Crimes of Writing*, p. 24.
[51] Richards, *Black Art*, p. 21.
[52] The term 'gaslighting' was originally coined by Patrick Hamilton's play *Gas Light* (1938) and became popularised through its film adaptations, *Gaslight* (1940) and *The Murder in Thornton Square* (1944).

place 'in power-laden *intimate* relationships', since 'trust and coercive interpersonal strategies bind the victim to the perpetrator'.[53] Patrick's power over Freda emanates from both his male privilege and his presumed spiritualist knowledge, and he does not hesitate to use the latter to urge Freda to drop her charges. For example, Patrick impersonates Freda's dead husband during a séance to communicate a threat: 'Do not act against another of the brethren. If you do so it will be at your peril' (*B*, 35). Patrick's manipulation of another's sense of reality indicates his familiarity with the methods of psychological warfare more generally; in fact, his use of suggestion resembles that of the expert propagandist who 'creates nothing, but can only arouse, combine and direct tendencies which already exist'.[54] Patrick is adept at exploiting Freda's loneliness and vulnerability to present his own lies as emerging from within Freda herself. Freda's unconscious attempt to exculpate Patrick is also evident at Patrick's trial, where her testimony fails to contribute to his conviction. In fact, Freda's genuine belief in spiritualism makes her go as far as to 'admit the possibility that one day when [she] was alone [she] wrote that letter while in a state of trance' (*B*, 214).

Following Freda's interrogation, Ronald is called to the witness box to provide evidence on whether Patrick's letter is a forgery:

> 'I have found,' said Ronald, 'from microscopic examination that certain letters have been formed from a starting-point different from those of Mrs. Flower's handwriting. The letter "o" for example […] has apparently been formed by different hands. […] The effect of trembling in some of the upward strokes of the signature in Exhibit B [alleged forgery],' said Ronald, 'is visible under the microscope. This trembling in some of the upward strokes is not present in the body of the letter and suggests that the signature has been traced…' (*B*, 216).

Such handwriting mistakes, rendered visible through scientific examination, suggest that the letter is a forgery created by a hand other than Freda's. However, Ronald's evidence is soon contested by that of an older fellow graphologist named Fairley. Fairley claims that the divergences in the starting points of the letters may simply emerge from 'the possibility that the writer was at one moment in a disposition to start from the top, and at another time disposed to begin elsewhere' (*B*, 224). In addition, he admits that the effect of trembling is sometimes 'due to sickness, fear or old age' (*B*, 225). As a result, Ronald's seemingly empirical conclusions are wiped out by the possibility that the implausible details he had previously identified might simply be 'the effects of variable human moods on handwriting' (*B*, 230). What are the implications of such inconclusive outcome for the novel's search for authenticity?

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[53] Page L. Sweet, 'The Sociology of Gaslighting', *American Sociological Review*, 84 (2019), 851-75 (p. 870).

[54] Frederic C. Bartlett, *Political Propaganda* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1940), p. 56.

Spark suggests that authenticity is an elusive concept that remains perpetually threatened by the prospect of forgery. Impervious to psychoanalysis and scientific detection, forgery may be more akin to a religion which allows varying shades of interpretation and conformity. Distinguishing the genuine from the spurious with full accuracy thus becomes a nearly impossible task, a matter of personal faith rather than microscopic examination. Despite Ronald's failure to gain acceptance for his forgery detection verdict, the court eventually convicts Patrick all the same as a recidivist for forgery and fraudulent conversion. Indeed, Spark playfully deploys the double meaning of 'fraudulent conversion' – meaning '[t]he action of (illegally) converting or applying something to one's own use' in legal terms, as well as the insincere adoption of a new faith in religious terms – in a novel whose characters dabble in various ideologies.[55] Spiritualism, Spark suggests, may well be a fraud, but science is far from able to provide every answer, be it in the field of forgery detection or elsewhere.

3. Commodifying the Author's Signature: *The Girls of Slender Means*

In *The Girls of Slender Means*, Nicholas Farringdon initially appears to be the character most closely associated with the world of propaganda, being employed – possibly as a Supreme Headquarters Allied Expeditionary Force (SHAEF) officer – by 'one of those left-hand departments of the Foreign Office', which had 'sent [him] on several missions to France' (*GSM*, 46). On closer inspection, however, May of Teck Club resident and publishing assistant Jane Wright emerges as the most adept at deploying the methods of psychological warfare throughout the novel. Jane's 'brain-work', which mostly consists in carrying out publishing duties and writing bogus letters, in fact necessitates the use of persuasion for personal manipulation. As part of her employment at the publishing firm Huy Throvis-Mew, Jane is responsible for sourcing intelligence on 'the financial circumstances and psychologically weak points' of prospective authors to enable her boss George Johnson to 'deal with them to a publisher's best advantage' (*GSM*, 27). When assessing an author's manuscript, Jane is required to look for 'a significant passage to cast doubt upon' with the aim of smashing the writer's self-confidence and securing a more advantageous contract; Nicholas Farringdon's manuscript, for example, is accused of being 'a bit derivative' (*GSM*, 33).

In her spare time, Jane carries out another ethically suspect activity under the tutelage of Romanian writer Rudi Bittesch, one of George's authors and a frequent visitor to the May of Teck Club. Jane is entrusted with forging admiring letters to famous writers purporting to have been written by people in difficult circumstances with the aim of eliciting handwritten responses –

[55] 'Conversion', in *The Oxford English Dictionary* [online], <https://www-oed-com.ezphost.dur.ac.uk/view/Entry/40773> [accessed 6 June 2022].

ideally featuring scarce autographs – which she can then profitably sell to Rudi. Here, Jane is exploiting the fact that 'each signature evokes someone's hand, writing: hence its talismanic appeal to collectors as the auratic residue of an authorial presence (the autograph as "authorgraph")'.[56] Rudi's commissioned forgeries are therefore commercially motivated attempts to reintroduce 'aura' in the age of mechanical reproduction.

Jane is aware that, for such forged letters to succeed at returning valuable autographs, she must appeal to the authors' emotions, hence the importance of selecting 'an author "with heart"' (*GSM*, 34). Such approach is not dissimilar from that of political propaganda, which, according to psychologist Frederic Bartlett, often 'whips up emotion and excitement directly […] to paralyse critical analysis'.[57] Eager to receive the highest rates of payment for her inventions, 'Jane's ingenuity was therefore awakened to the feat of composing the sort of letters which would best move the recipient to reply in total holograph' (*GSM*, 34). Her prison and asylum letter templates, for instance, are designed to arouse the authors' pity so as to prompt handwritten responses. Jane's letter to Ernest Hemingway, which adopts the former template, reads as follows:

> Dear Mr. Hemingway,
>
> I am addressing this letter to you care of your publisher in the confidence that it will be sent on to you. […] I am sure you receive many admiring letters, and have hesitated to add yet another to your post-bag. But since my release from prison, where I have been for the past two years and four months, I have felt more and more that I want you to know how much your novels meant to me during that time. I had few visitors. My allotted weekly hours of leisure were spent in the Library. It was unheated alas, but I did not notice the cold as I read on. Nothing I read gave me so much courage to face the future and to build a new future on my release as *For Whom the Bell Tolls*. The novel gave me back my faith in life.
>
> I just want you to know this, and to say 'Thank you'.
>
> Yours sincerely
>
> (Miss) J. Wright
>
> PS. This is not a begging letter. I assure you I would return any money that was sent to me (*GSM*, 34).

The first and last sentences of the letter are purely pragmatic, conceived to soften up the publishers into forwarding the letter to the authors and to bypass any charges of 'criminal offence under false pretences', respectively (*GSM*, 35). However, the main body of the letter has been expertly crafted to positively influence the authors by acknowledging their popularity and praising their work.

Such emphasis on the manipulation of feeling is not dissimilar from that of Second World War propagandists who aimed to 'win popular support for a cause by captivating the emotions

[56] Ruthven, p. 153.
[57] Bartlett, p. 66.

and flattering the reason of the public'.[58] In particular, Delmer described flattery as 'the way to the heart of the Nazis' and employed it regularly in his black propaganda campaigns to Germany (*BB*, 53). Having built rapport through flattery, Jane's explicit mention of the 'unheated' library, no doubt intended to appeal to Mr. Hemingway's compassion, adds a layer of tragedy to the prison experience, which, coupled with Jane's insistence on the prisoner's persistent reading in the face of adversity works to redeem her as a courageous individual worthy of the authors' sympathy. Jane's manipulation of the authors' feelings in her prison letter often succeeds in bringing in warm-hearted responses which are instantly collected and commodified by Rudi for their 'increasing value year by year' (*GSM*, 35).

Jane's forgery work also highlights the importance of collecting up-to-date intelligence about the authors she intends to target. For example, Jane addresses a letter to Henry James before learning from Rudi that '[t]hat was foolish […] because James is dead' (*GSM*, 36). However, Jane learnt through experience how to personalise her inventions, becoming increasingly more successful at influencing authors to her advantage. When drafting a letter for Somerset W. Maugham, an author who worked as an intelligence agent in Switzerland during the First World War and drew on this experience to write spy novels, Jane realised that

> [t]he prison letter might not appeal to [him]. Rudi had said he was cynical about human nature. On a brain-wave she recalled that he had been a doctor. It might be an idea to make up a sanatorium letter … She had been ill for two years and four months with tuberculosis. […] She gave a frail cough and looked round the room. […] Jane felt she might easily be in a room in a sanatorium (*GSM*, 37-8).[59]

Since, according to Bruce Lockhart, Director General of the PWE, '[i]magination […] is one of the essential qualities [of a good propagandist], especially where leaflets are concerned', Jane's capacity to go as far as to impersonate a tuberculosis patient and render her May of Teck room as a sanatorium room in preparation for drafting her latest bogus letter testifies to her innate talent for persuasion.[60] The perceived resemblance of Jane's actual room to that of a fictional sanatorium foregrounds Jane's slender means, yet her depressing wartime circumstances are often alleviated

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[58] TNA: PRO INF 1/724, 'Memorandum by the International Broadcasting and Propaganda Enquiry, 21 June 1939.' Reprinted in full in Phillip M. Taylor, 'Techniques of Persuasion: Basic Ground Rules of British Propaganda during the Second World War', *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television*, 1 (1981), pp. 59-65 (p. 61).

[59] Maugham 'was recruited into Britain's secret service in 1915 after the authorities learned that he was fluent in German and French. His novel, *Of Human Bondage*, had just been published and he used his reputation as an author as a cover for his operational intelligence activities. He was assigned to Switzerland to expose German-agent networks and to coordinate with Allied counterintelligence services.' See 'Maugham, W. Somerset', in *Encyclopedia of Intelligence and Counterintelligence*, ed. by Rodney P. Carlisle (Abingdon: Routledge, 2005). <https://search-credoreference-com.ezphost.dur.ac.uk/content/entry/sharpint/maugham_w_somerset> Perhaps Spark intends to suggest that his intelligence work made him 'cynical about human nature'.

[60] FO 898/99, Lectures. 1943.

by the recollection of her youth: ‘she found it useful to remember that she was only twenty-two, for the fact cheered her up’ (*GSM*, 33). As I discuss in Chapter 2, Spark seldom allows her characters to engage in self-pity – most likely another legacy of the PWE’s unsentimental stance.

In fact, Jane dislikes Rudi partly because he is ‘too old for her’ and prefers to spend her time with the ‘jolly good-looking’ Nicholas, whose manuscript *The Sabbath Notebook* is being considered for publication by Jane’s employer (*GSM*, 33, 36). After receiving ‘a long emotional letter from [George] making a lot of complaints about [his] book’, Nicholas learns from Jane that George’s publishing strategy consists in locating ‘the author’s weak spot’ in order to weaken their writing morale (*GSM*, 78). As retribution for George’s professional misconduct, Nicholas, a self-described ‘crook’, proposes that Jane should write a letter in praise of his manuscript purporting to have been written by novelist Charles Morgan to encourage George to make a favourable offer to publish his book without delay. In contrast to Jane’s depressing business collaboration with Rudi, Jane’s reaction to Nicholas’ proposed forgery is enthusiastic: ‘Jane’s life began to sprout once more, green with possibility’ (*GSM*, 79). The reason is that, unlike Jane’s forgeries for Rudi, Nicholas’ forgery is not commodifiable; instead, its purpose is purely creative and moral, seeking to set the record straight not only for Nicholas, but also symbolically for all authors who have been abused by Huy Throvis-Mew. Nicholas suggests that the forged letter should read as follows:

> ‘Dear Mr Farringdon, When first I received your manuscript I was tempted to place it aside for my secretary to return to you with some polite excuse. But as happy chance would have it, before passing your work to my secretary, I flicked over the pages and my eyes lit on …’
>
> ‘Lit on what?’ said Jane.
>
> ‘I’ll leave that to you. Only choose one of the most concise and brilliant passages when you come to write the letter. […] Charles Morgan is to say he read that one piece, and then the whole, avidly, from start to finish. He is to say it’s a work of genius. He congratulates me on a work of genius, you realise. Then, I show the letter to George’ (*GSM*, 78-9).

Nicholas’ bogus letter relies primarily on coincidence to validate its truth claim. By recognising the unlikelihood of Morgan picking Nicholas’ manuscript out of the slush pile, let alone reading it ‘avidly’, Morgan’s behaviour acquires a semblance of credibility, on the assumption that unlikely actions are rarely shown to be false. Ironically, Nicholas’ evaluation of his manuscript as ‘a work of genius’ appears to uphold the Romantic cult of the author that Jane and himself radically discredit through their practice of spurious letter writing.

When writing her Morgan letter, Jane, like Howe, devotes great attention to stylistic matters such as the handwriting and the letterhead. After reading a first draft, Jane begins work on ‘an authentic-looking letter in a small but mature hand such as Charles Morgan might use’ (*GSM*, 80). She also handwrites the address provided by Nicholas at the top of the letter, which turns out to be a plausible arrangement, ‘since many nice people did not attempt to have their letter-heads printed in war-time and thus make unnecessary demands on the nation's labour' (*GSM*, 80). Jane intends to hand her finished Morgan letter to Nicholas during Joanna's poetry recitation at the May of Teck Club. However, in doing so, an unfortunate incident threatens to sabotage her meticulous forgery work:

> While reading [the letter], [Nicholas] was handed a cup of coffee. In the process of taking the cup he splashed some coffee on the letter.
>
> 'Oh, you've ruined it!' Jane said. 'I'll have to do it all over again.'
>
> 'It looks more authentic than ever,' Nicholas said. 'Naturally, if I've received a letter from Charles Morgan telling me I'm a genius, I am going to spend a lot of time reading it over and over, in the course of which the letter must begin to look a bit worn' (*GSM*, 85).

Jane's protestation is unwarranted since the coffee stain serves the purpose of confirming, rather than disproving, the letter's authenticity. Such an episode demonstrates that authenticity – so-called – can easily be manufactured for financial or personal gain by interested parties. In particular, it validates the aforementioned suggestion that the accidental, rather than the deliberate, shows potential for acting as the 'false note' that paradoxically guarantees the authenticity of documentary evidence (see Chapter 1). As Nicholas implies, the coffee stain imbues the forged letter with a history that confirms its authenticity, since no forger would have deliberately spilled coffee on a spurious document.

Like Spark herself, Jane and Nicholas ultimately veer between commitment to and suspicion of realist aesthetics as a consequence of their awareness of the manifold ways in which textual evidence can be manipulated, which further leads them to regard what looks real as necessarily suspect. Although forged letters enable Jane and Nicholas to fulfil their artistic and material needs, they also raise ethical concerns about the possibility of enacting and living by dangerous fictions in the real world. This is the chief theme of Spark's *Loitering with Intent*, a novel that uses plagiarism to explore the extent to which fiction might appear to be more truthful than life itself, and to which I now turn.

4. Plagiarism, or Stealing the Author's Myth: *Loitering with Intent*

Loitering with Intent foregrounds Spark's categorical distinction between forgery and plagiarism: forgery has the potential to be a creative endeavour, as testified by Jane's Morgan letter for Nicholas in *The Girls of Slender Means*, whereas plagiarism is perceived as a necessarily immoral, and even criminal act. In fact, Spark takes issue with plagiarism because it necessitates both the dissociation of a text from its author and the association of such text with an impostor who had no role in its creation but takes credit for the imaginative labour of the genuine author. Moreover, since authorship – as suggested by Plato – can act as guarantor of accountability, the most dangerous texts might be precisely those that remain uncredited or miscredited, having been manipulated by authors who remain in the shadow, as the characters of Fleur and Sir Quentin demonstrate in this novel.

Novelist Fleur Talbot is hired by Sir Quentin as secretary of the Autobiographical Association and tasked with typing and editing the dreadful memoirs written by its members. Characterised by 'nostalgia', 'paranoia' and 'a transparent craving on the part of the authors to appear likeable', such memoirs show no literary value until Fleur 'hit on the method of making them expertly worse' to the satisfaction of all parties (*LI*, 19). Even Sir Quentin, who had initially found Fleur's amendments 'rather extravagant', soon comes to appreciate the advantages of her fictionalising approach, for he 'had plans for inducing [her] to write more compromising stuff into these memoirs', being unaware that Fleur 'had no intention of writing anything beyond what cheered up the boring parts of the job for the time being and what could feed [her] imagination for [her] novel *Warrender Chase*' (*LI*, 24). However, Fleur is aware that reality shapes fiction just as much as fiction shapes reality; in fact, she views fiction as an epistemological tool that can help her to fully grasp the world she inhabits. For example, Fleur disapproves of Dottie's confessional writing for Sir Quentin because she suspects he intends to use it for some sinister purpose that she hopes to understand by 'work[ing] it out through her own creativity' in the chapters of her novel (*LI*, 47).

In fact, Fleur distrusts the professed frankness of autobiographical discourse and regards fiction as potentially more truthful than life itself. For example, when considering the members' autobiographies, she felt that '[p]resented fictionally, one could have done something authentic with that poor material. But the inducing them to express themselves in life resulted in falsity' (*LI*, 86). Like Nicholas in *The Girls of Slender Means*, Fleur recognises that so-called authenticity can be fabricated and manipulated by interested parties, in this case by Sir Quentin and herself. Such textual manipulation resembles that of PWE propagandists insofar as it is covert and therefore remains largely unchallenged providing that it withstands exposure as fraudulent. Nevertheless, Fleur and Sir Quentin show diverging motives. While Fleur's intention appears quite innocent, simply seeking to embellish the members' dull autobiographies and source inspiration for her own novel, Sir Quentin's intention is clearly more harmful. In fact, Fleur believes that he must be 'engaged in some form of racket, with maybe an eye to blackmail' and vows to resign 'as soon as [her] vague uneasiness and [her] suspicions […] should crystallise into anything concrete' (*LI*, 43).

Yet Fleur soon becomes personally implicated in Sir Quentin's activities when she realises that he is 'using, stealing, [her] myth', that is, he is plagiarising excerpts from her novel

Warrender Chase (*LI*, 105). When perusing one of the memoirs in Sir Quentin's cabinet, Fleur realised that

> sheets of notes, some typed, some in Sir Quentin's hand had been inserted, familiar passages; they were lifted more or less directly from [her] *Warrender Chase*. […] [She] thought how easy it was to steal, and [she] thought of Sir Quentin stealing [her] book, not only the physical copies, but the very words, phrases, ideas. […] [She] could see he had even stolen a letter [she] had invented, written from [her] Warrender Chase to [her] character Marjorie (*LI*, 109-10).

Sir Quentin's plagiarism of Fleur's writing is here criminalised as theft of both material and intellectual property. However, it is evident that Fleur is primarily angered by the unacknowledged appropriation of her creative ideas, over which she feels an almost sacred sense of intellectual ownership mirroring that of the Romantic theory of originality. To Fleur, Sir Quentin is a literary parasite sapping the well of her originality, which, to make matters worse, he intends to instrumentalise for dishonest ends. In fact, Sir Quentin's appropriation of the memoirs of the Autobiographical Association members renders them Frankenstein-like monsters, assembled with the help of fragments from Fleur's original manuscript, which is closely bound with her own identity as an artist. Thus, Fleur, not unlike her Romantic predecessors, regards plagiarism as 'a threat, a fear, a panic, a plague […] it is imagined as despotic – contagious, sickening, unnatural and terminal; to be guarded against only with the most vigilant surveillance'.[61]

Fleur's connection with Romantic culture is further enhanced by her association with Mary Shelley, an author with whom Spark herself felt much affinity. Initially fostered by personal coincidence – Spark and Shelley share their initials and Spark's date of birth (1st of February) coincides with Shelley's date of death –, Spark's scholarly interest in Shelley soon revealed a sense of creative debt towards her female predecessor. As Stannard argues, Mary Shelley 'provided a style of existence for the female artist against which Muriel might define herself'.[62] In fact, Spark's own biography of Shelley – originally entitled *Child of Light* – is described at proposal stage as an essentially feminist project aiming to disentangle the author of *Frankenstein* from her husband Percy Shelley and to establish her reputation as 'an important 19th-century literary figure in her own right' (*MS*, xi). In doing so, Spark sought to set the record straight by foregrounding the literary achievements of Shelley, a writer who she felt had been unfairly overlooked. On a personal level, Spark, much like Shelley, was an intellectual woman who succeeded in developing her writing talent despite constantly struggling against patriarchal oppression and poverty. On a creative level, Spark believed that Shelley's writing, though 'lacking the craftmanship […] of Jane Austen' and 'the emotional force of the Brontës', had

[61] Groom, p. 27.
[62] Stannard, *Muriel Spark*, p. 116.

valuable qualities which had hitherto been sorely neglected (*MS*, xii).[63] In particular, Shelley's ability to blend realism with fantasy to create 'a kind of female Gothic surrealism' provided a feminist experimental model for the mixing of literary genres which characterises much of Spark's fiction.[64]

In *Loitering with Intent*, Fleur rejoices in her sense of belonging to a line of women artists dating back to Shelley herself, often musing on '"[h]ow wonderful it feels to be an artist and a woman in the twentieth century."' (*LI*, 15) Similarly to Shelley, who 'formed the habit of taking her books to her mother's grave in St. Pancras Churchyard […] to pursue her studies', Fleur frequents an old graveyard in Kensington, where she is found by a policeman writing a poem, an episode described in the first and last chapters of the novel (*MS*, 16). The graveyard thus emerges as a site of literary inspiration for Shelley and Fleur alike. The beginning of the last chapter – an elaboration of the beginning of the first chapter – in fact introduces Fleur's potentially criminal activity, that of 'loitering with intent', that gives its title to the novel. Making use of the same fictionalising method she had previously applied to the members' autobiographies, Fleur here tweaks her previous account and inserts new material as a literary means of 'loitering with intent'. In doing so, Fleur acknowledges that all writing requires, to a certain extent, borrowing and shaping pre-existing ideas for the achievement of an author's creative purpose. Whether such an act constitutes plagiarism largely depends on the author's conscious decision to acknowledge (or not) their original sources.

Fleur soon realises that Sir Quentin, not content with plagiarising Fleur's manuscript, or, as Fleur puts it, stealing her myth, is actually intent on 'putting […] *Warrender Chase* into practice' (*LI*, 133). As Fleur reflects,

> Warrender Chase was killed in a car crash while everyone is assembled, waiting for him. Quentin Oliver's destiny, if he wants to enact Warrender Chase, would be the same. […] It was almost as if Sir Quentin was unreal and I had merely invented him, Warrender Chase being a man, a real man on whom I had partly based Sir Quentin (*LI*, 137).

Instead of fiction plagiarising reality, Fleur is unnerved by the idea that reality might in fact be plagiarising fiction. Fleur's hypothesis is eventually proved correct when Sir Quentin dies in a car crash while the members of the autobiographical society are waiting for him, which serves the purpose of validating *Warrender Chase*'s realist credentials by virtue of their probabilistic

[63] More concretely, Spark admires *Frankenstein* and *The Last Man* for 'being the prototypes of the scientific extravaganza popularized by H.G. Well, and recently reflected in the novels of Aldous Huxley and George Orwell' (*MS*, xii).
[64] Stannard, p. 117.

attributes, for '[s]uch events as [Fleur] had portrayed, even in a different way from the reality, could happen' (*LI*, 157).

Plagiarism was already an important theme in Spark's debut novel *The Comforters*, where the Typing Ghost orally plagiarises Caroline Rose's thoughts in the process of turning her into a character in a novel. However, *Loitering with Intent* can be seen to reverse the process by presenting readers with a character who plagiarises the author's work in a textual manner. Both Fleur and Caroline Rose – already connected through their floral names – upset the boundary between fiction and reality insofar as they are authors who need to discard their own ontological status as fictions in order to embrace authorship. Like Caroline before her, Fleur strives to externalise Sir Quentin and the members of the Autobiographical Association: 'they were morally outside of myself, they were objectified. I would write about them one day' (*LI*, 150). Likewise, the role of Sir Quentin as plagiarist is subsequently taken up by unimaginative novelist Hector Bartlett, who adopts fake newspaper cuttings (the mid-century equivalent of 'fake news') for personal intimidation in Spark's *A Far Cry from Kensington*.

5. Fabricating Fake News for Personal Intimidation: *A Far Cry from Kensington*

A Far Cry from Kensington follows the life and career of Mrs. Hawkins, an editor at the financially precarious publishing firm Ullswater and York. Not unlike Patrick in *The Bachelors*, Mrs. Hawkins' boss Mr. York resorts to the forgery of signatures to escape bankruptcy, which leads to 'eight charges of uttering forged bankers' documents and intent to defraud', and eventually results in 'seven years' imprisonment' (*FCK*, 45). However, unlike *The Bachelors*, *The Girls of Slender Means* and *Loitering with Intent*, the focus of *A Far Cry from Kensington* is not the forgery of personal documents. Instead, the novel moves from the private to the public sphere in order to examine the production of fake news – in the guise of fictional but officially-looking newspaper cuttings masquerading as trustworthy information – and its harmful effects on a targeted individual, the Polish dressmaker Wanda Podolak.

From the beginning of the novel, Mrs. Hawkins shows strong disapproval of Hector Bartlett, an aspiring writer who persistently pesters her to solicit an introduction to her employer. Mrs. Hawkins regards Hector as a *pisseur de copie* who 'knew the titles of all the right books, and the names of the authors' but had 'read very little', so could only show off by 'vomit[ing] literary matter' (*FCK*, 39-40). In addition, his pretentious writing 'writhed and ached with twists and turns and tergiversations, inept words, fanciful repetitions, far-fetched verbosity and long Latin-based words' (*FCK*, 40). Much to Mrs. Hawkins' chagrin, Hector has become the protégé of the accomplished novelist Emma Loy, whose insistence on furthering his career has caused

Mrs. Hawkins to lose her job (twice) by refusing to publish Hector's appalling manuscript. Yet Mrs. Hawkins' contempt for Hector does not simply stem from his lack of literary ability, but from his moral corruption. While lunching at a popular pub for creative professionals in Covent Garden, Mrs. Hawkins noticed 'a sausage roll which a man was idly letting hang from his left hand' and amusedly witnessed how a 'dog just helped himself to a bite of this dangling sausage roll' (*FCK*, 98). Mrs. Hawkins quickly realised that the man was in fact Hector Bartlett. Seeking revenge for his stolen bite, Hector 'took a large dab of mustard […], dabbed it on the rest of the sausage roll, and gave it to the greedy dog' who was soon 'sick on the floor' (*FCK*, 98). For Spark, an animal-loving writer who had sadly lost several dogs and cats to poison during her time in Italy, it is evident that 'to watch helplessly while an animal agonises in poisoned death-throes is to encounter evil at first hand' (AGC, 169).

Hector's wickedness is further highlighted by his treatment of Wanda, a vulnerable refugee who shares lodgings with Mrs. Hawkins at landlady Milly's house. Unbeknown to Mrs. Hawkins, Hector Bartlett purports to be Wanda's cousin in order to visit her room and persuade her to operate a 'black box' capable of exerting good or ill over others. When Wanda refuses to continue operating the black box to harm Mrs. Hawkins, Hector responds with blackmail, whose trail Mrs. Hawkins follows, but unfortunately discovers too late to save Wanda. The first sign that Hector might be planning some mischief comes from Cathy, Mrs. Hawkins' former colleague, now working as bookkeeper to printer Mr. Well. Cathy reveals that Hector has commissioned a peculiar printing job from Mr. Wells, which 'consisted in printing in columns like in a newspaper, and on paper like a newspaper, so that the final result would look like a cutting from an actual newspaper' (*FCK*, 112). Significantly, such newspaper cuttings are not mere copies from actual newspapers: instead, Hector 'brings a page', which is 'typed out' and 'made like from the newspaper' (*FCK*, 113). Hector's claim that his presentation of writing in newspaper style constitutes a 'new form of fiction' is dismissed by Mr. Wells, who sees it simply as the product of a deranged mind (*FCK*, 113). Both interpretations, however, succeed at masking Hector's more sinister purpose.

Following Wanda's 'suicide while of unsound mind', Milly shows Mrs. Hawkins some suspicious documents – 'two press cuttings, one tiny, one longer, and three small crumpled envelopes' – she has discovered while clearing her room (*FCK*, 157). By examining the envelopes, one of which is labelled 'Haukens' (most likely Wanda's incorrect spelling of Mrs. Hawkins' name), Mrs. Hawkins realises that they contain 'hairs [that Wanda has presumably used] to work a silly box for curing people' (*FCK*, 158). The small newspaper cutting contains an advertisement in the personal column for Wanda's dressmaking services. However, the longer newspaper cutting, entitled ‘Polish Dressmaker Under Investigation’, appears to be a news cutting and reads as follows:

> Police are investigating the activities of a Polish lady resident in our country with headquarters in Kensington who advertises regularly in the Personal columns of our newspapers. Invariably, the Personal message comes in the following apparently innocent words. [The Personal advertisement in the small press-cutting repeated.]
>
> But what is behind this message? The lady in question, Mrs Wanda Podolak, of 14 Church End Villas, South Kensington, explained in an interview, ‘I am only trying to help people. There is nothing malign whatsoever in my activities. It is not true that I practice witchcraft or try to alter the personality of my clients by means of radionics. It is not true that I obtain snippings of their hair when they come to have their clothes fitted. I am a bona fide dressmaker and a practising Catholic.’
>
> The police deny they are investigating the case of a young woman who has begun to lose weight mysteriously after being treated by radionics at the establishment of Mrs Podolak in the respectable Victorian house in Church End Villas where the ‘dressmaker’ operates. ‘If the young lady in question has complained that she is wasting away,’ said the police spokesman, ‘we are not aware of it and if we were we would advise her to see a doctor.’ The spokesman admitted, however, that they were looking into other aspects of a possible ‘racket’ being conducted at 14 Church End Villas (*FCK*, 159).

Such newspaper cuttings recall the PWE newspaper *Nachrichten für die Truppe*, which reiterated – in the more durable medium of print – news items mixing truth and falsehood that had been previously broadcast via *Soldatensender Calais*.

Hector, who makes a living through the art of persuasion, be it of Emma Loy or Mrs. Hawkins herself, certainly seems attuned to the methods of psychological warfare, which he effortlessly deploys for the successful intimidation of Wanda. Like Delmer, who would retrieve the names, addresses and occupations of real people from his ‘file of personalities’ in order to populate and give credence to his often-deceptive propaganda, Hector is careful to feature Wanda’s full name, address and occupation in his newspaper cuttings, thus allowing the news to be (partly) corroborated by any interested parties. Moreover, Hector’s fake news item makes extensive use of another of the PWE’s methods of psychological warfare: the use of denial to suggest that the information being discredited is in fact trustworthy. For example, the PWE created a counterfeit radio station of Mussolini’s Munich-broadcast ‘Fascist Republican Radio’, which relayed the first and third parts of the original programme, but inserted its own subversive material into the second part in the expectation that Italians would tune in by mistake and think it was the original radio station (*BB*, 105-6). As a result of this operation, ‘the Duce's Munich men were indignantly and vehemently denying that they had said the appalling things which monitors all over the world reported them as saying’ and the PWE ‘got them so tangled up in denials and counter-denials that in the end, Dr. Goebbels decided he must shut down their short-wave broadcasts altogether' (*BB*, 106). Here, the PWE uses denial to cause confusion and encourage the Italians to doubt their government-sanctioned version of events. In Hector's concocted news story, denial fulfils a similar role insofar as it leads Wanda to doubt her sense of reality and suspect that the British authorities must be investigating her presumed engagement in illicit activities. As a powerless refugee running the risk of statelessness if she were to be convicted for such a crime, the bleak prospect of this possibility tips her mentally over the edge and prompts her eventual self-destruction.

The author of this lethal prank turns out to be none other than Hector Bartlett, who had commissioned the newspaper cuttings from Mr. Wells' printing firm. Unlike her landlady Milly, Mrs. Hawkins' expertise in typographic design prevents her from being taken in by this piece of fake news, for 'Mr Wells was not such a fine artist as to reproduce a newspaper cutting which would appear authentic to anyone used to handling them' (*FCK*, 159). In contrast, captured German documents warned that a 'seditious leaflet' produced by the PWE was 'dangerous because they were printed as official news and so skilfully made up that it is not immediately recognisable as propaganda'.[65] In fact, both Howe and Delmer emphasise the importance of paying attention to the minutest details when forging documents to prevent the deception from being given away. Although Hector's fake newspaper cutting blatantly intimidates Wanda to the extent that she decides to take her own life, Mrs. Hawkins is convinced that the unearthed evidence will lead to nothing more than 'some token thing, like questioning Hector Bartlett', who might easily claim it had all been 'a joke' (*FCK*, 160).

Nevertheless, Spark chooses to foreground the forged newspaper cuttings – crucial to the resolution of the plot – to warn that textual manipulation has the potential to bring about concrete, tangible consequences in the real world, as she well knew from her time at the PWE. Yet textual manipulation can be the cause of both good and evil. Whereas Hector resembles Sir Quentin in his use of forgery for selfish purposes, Jane's Morgan letter demonstrates the anarchic potential of the forged text to challenge the authority of her employer and enable the development of new, and potentially transformative, perspectives. By similarly displacing authorship, PWE forgeries, not unlike Jane's Morgan letter, sought to counteract fascism from within with the aim of hastening the fall of the Nazi regime and the establishment of a new German democracy in the context of the wartime state of exception.

[65] FO 898/465, "Black" Leaflet Comebacks: Reports on Reactions to. 1943-5.

6. Forging a Bodily Double: *Aiding and Abetting*

Spark's fiction, much like PWE printed matter, makes use of mimicry to pose a threat to the notion of clear-cut authenticity; in the process, it introduces alternative, and often subversive, perspectives which challenge the authoritative interpretation of the text. Although this is most evident in Spark's 'forgery' novels, she was also fascinated by yet another kind of duplicity, namely that of impostorship. Fiction and impostorship are in fact closely allied, for as Wayne C. Booth argues, 'the writer sets himself out with a different air depending on the needs of particular works'.[66] Each novel thus features a distinct 'implied author' – 'an implicit picture of an author who stands behind the scenes, whether as stage manager, as puppeteer, or as an indifferent God, silently paring his fingernails'.[67] The latter, Malcolm Bradbury famously claimed, is the case with Spark.[68] Yet Spark moves beyond the authorial impostorship enacted by her 'implied authors' to further problematise the notion of authenticity not only within the written text, as this chapter has demonstrated, but also within the aural text (see Chapter 3) and even within the bodily text itself.

In *Aiding and Abetting*, for example, Beate Pappenheim and Lord Lucan acquire new identities in order to free themselves from their past crimes. Beate, formerly an impoverished medicine student, would pose as a stigmata and use the pretence as a cover for the forgery of a leaflet soliciting money from gullible Catholics. Lord Lucan, meanwhile, was charged with the murder of his children's nanny, mistaken for his wife, who was the actual target for his intended killing. While Beate's impostorship now singularly concerns her name – for she has become Dr. Hildegarde Wolf, a sought-after psychoanalyst – Lord Lucan recruits Walker – a servant of Lucan's host in South America – as a bodily double who travels around the world as a cover for himself so as to distract the authorities from the real possessor of the name. Lord Lucan carefully cultivates Walker's appearance so that it matches his own so closely that nobody might be able to distinguish the original from the copy. However, Walker's voice – his unique marker of identity – remains troublesome. Even though 'Walker had adopted the slightly plummy full-fruited accents of Lucan's speech, […] it was not quite right', so Lucan preferred to collect funds from his friends himself lest Walker should be exposed (*AA*, 95). Here, Spark foregrounds again the significance of the voice as a sign of authenticity, since Walker's voice, similarly to those of PWE black propaganda broadcasters, is perpetually at risk of giving away the deception (see Chapter 3).

[66] Wayne C. Booth, *The Rhetoric of Fiction*, 2nd edn (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1983), p. 71.
[67] Booth, p. 151.
[68] See Malcolm Bradbury, 'Muriel Spark's Fingernails', in *Critical Essays on Muriel Spark*, ed. by Joseph Hynes (G.K. Hall & Co: New York, 1992), pp. 187-93.

Similar strategies of fictive deception were deployed in military operations during the Second World War. In January 1944, British Army officer and film aficionado Dudley Clarke came up with a propitious idea after watching actor Erich von Stroheim playing Erwin Rommel in *Five Graves to Cairo*: could an actor possibly impersonate General Montgomery for the purposes of military deception? In the spring of 1944, the actor M.E. Clifton James was recruited to impersonate General Montgomery in Gibraltar, Algiers, and Cairo with the aim of 'divert[ing] Axis attention away from the Channel, where the real Allied attacks would shortly be coming, and back to the Mediterranean', in what became known as Operation Copperhead.[69] To succeed in this impersonation, James, who naturally resembled General Montgomery, had 'to study Montgomery's bird-like gestures and mannerisms, the way he pinched his cheek, the way he ate his vegetarian food, his impulsive visits to schools, his boyishness, and the rigid rituals of deference and procedure around him', as well as his 'high-pitched, incisive way of talking, and his voice as parched as the desert'.[70]

In his autobiography *I Was Monty's Double* (1954), James describes his experience of impersonating Montgomery:

> I slipped into my role so completely that to all intents and purposes I *was* General Montgomery. I talked as he talked and faithfully imitated his every gesture and vocal mannerism. Even when I was alone I found myself playing the part.[71]

James' undercover role appeared to have deceived even the actor himself, for he evidently struggled to distinguish between his real and his fabricated identity. Although it is unclear whether Spark was acquainted with Operation Copperhead through James' *I Was Monty's Double* (1954) or its film adaptation of the same name, directed by John Guillermin (1958), she was undoubtedly fascinated with the question of authenticity, particularly the difficulty of distinguishing the original from the copy, both in authorship and impostorship.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have argued that Spark's fiction satirises the Romantic notion of authenticity while retaining a commitment to authenticity as guarantee of authorial accountability. However, Spark's PWE experience taught her that so-called authenticity can easily be manipulated – or even manufactured – and used as a weapon to persuade individuals to act according to the wishes of interested parties. However, Spark recognises that forgery per se is not necessarily an evil act. In fact, Spark's fiction draws a clear distinction between forgery-as-theft and forgery-as-

[69] Nicholas Rankin, *A Genius for Deception: How Cunning Help the British Win Two World Wars* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), p. 385.
[70] Rankin, *Genius for Deception*, p. 387.
[71] M.E. Clifton James, *I Was Monty's Double* (London: Rider and Company, 1954), p. 144.

creativity. While the former constitutes a crime against the imagination, committed for selfish financial gain, as is the case of the forged letter in *The Bachelors* and Sir Quentin's plagiarism in *Loitering with Intent*, the latter shows potential to act as a powerful corrective to the social and political establishment, providing new, and potentially transformative perspectives, as is the case of the Morgan letter in *The Girls of Slender Means*. Furthermore, Spark's desire to exercise control over her textual legacy demonstrates the importance she ascribed to the notion of accountability, which crucially distinguishes art from propaganda. Although the PWE's mimicking of a National Style resulted in propaganda that was akin to fiction, Spark acknowledges that the former, emanating from a propagandist operating in the shadows, prioritises reader-response at the expense of authorship. As a result, printed propaganda – unacknowledged and ethically unaccountable – can potentially propagate in an unrestrained manner not dissimilar from that of oral discourses such as rumours insofar as they both share clandestine origins.

5. Rumour-Mongering: From Collective Problem-Solving to Subversive Weapon

Introduction

In Spark's little-known children's short story 'The French Window', an elegant and snobbish French window named Mademoiselle Marie-Louise Yvonne de Crespigny-Foulard – known as 'Lou' – grows resentful of both her new owner Georgie, who constantly tells his friends that he purchased her from a junk shop for a bargain price, and the other windows in Georgie's home, who fail to admire her grandeur. To take revenge on them, she decides to spread a deceptive rumour intended to wreak havoc in the household: '"Georgie is going to run away with Kaspar's wife, Betty [the wife of Georgie's lead peasant]. I heard them making their plans out there among the tall rose-clumps before dawn this morning. Tomorrow they will be far away and Kaspar will have no wife any more"' (FW, 19). Like most gossip, Lou's rumour has a grain of truth, for Georgie and Betty had met in the garden at dawn to plan Kaspar's birthday party. However, unable to overhear their conversation, Lou draws on the plots of trashy romance to craft what she feels is a plausible story and 'almost came to believe it' when recounting it to Mr. Edgar and Miss So-and-so, the two highest windows in the house, who promptly pass the story on to Cookie, one of Kaspar's windows (FW, 19-20).[1] When Kaspar hears the rumour from Cookie, he is enraged and neglects the barking of his dog Olaf, who helplessly tries 'to warn [him] against making hasty judgements', to the extent that he stages a peasant uprising that causes much damage to Georgie's windows (FW, 24). Fortunately, the heroic Miss So-and-so lifts the glass from her pane and falls on Kaspar's head, imparting 'a sobering effect on [his] fiery mind' (FW, 29). After 'nearly br[inging] disaster on the house with her unpleasant gossip', Lou eventually gets repaired – losing some of her beauty in the process – and learns her lesson, subsequently becoming 'more friendly and agreeable towards the other windows in the house' (FW, 31-2).

Kaspar's peasant revolt seems to evoke the Great Fear that fuelled rural unrest at the start of the French Revolution due to widespread belief in the *Pacte de Famine* (Famine Pact) – an elite conspiracy plot to withhold grain from the peasants – so it is no wonder that Lou is a *French*

[1] Amy Woodbury Tease points out that, in *The French Window*, hierarchy 'has nothing to do with origins: the windows are valued for their structural position as it allows them to conduct effective surveillance, to see beyond the estate and into the village below.' See Amy Woodbury Tease, 'Muriel Spark's Windows and the Architecture of Surveillance', *The Crooked Dividend: Essays on Muriel Spark*, ed. by Gerard Carruthers and Helen Stoddart (Glasgow: Association for Scottish Literary Studies, 2022), pp. 204-22 (p. 216).

window.[2] Just like the *Pacte de Famine*, Georgie's alleged romantic liaison with Betty proves to be unsubstantiated, despite its real-life effects. The moral of the story is twofold: Lou is evidently given a warning against the deliberate spread of fabricated rumours and the reader is more subtly alerted to the serious consequences of Kaspar's failure to corroborate Lou's scandalous gossip. Letting himself be carried away by his emotions, Kaspar disregards Olaf's sonic caution – a further example of what I have previously described as Spark's 'aesthetics of interruption', which aims to encourage critical thinking (see Chapter 3) – and solely reacts to the physical deterrent of Miss So-and-so once damage to Georgie's property and reputation has already been caused. By foregrounding Kaspar's behaviour, Spark illustrates the dangers of gullibility and invites readers to exercise scepticism concerning unverified information – even if purporting to emerge from expert or eyewitness sources – if one is to avoid falling prey to psychological manipulation.

Spark's critique of the fabrication and dissemination of rumours that seek to present fiction as truth can be traced back to her PWE employment during the Second World War. While British domestic propaganda explicitly urged citizens to refrain from spreading rumours through the 'Careless Talk Costs Lives' campaign, PWE propagandists covertly crafted deceptive rumours designed to undermine enemy military operations and civilian morale, as well as to bolster the morale of the occupied populations of Europe.[3] Unlike Lou's rumour, PWE rumours were unacknowledged – most often spread through clandestine radio stations or SOE agents' word-of-mouth – and, therefore, extremely difficult to trace back to their British source. Aware that people, attuned to cognitive ease, are generally reluctant to verify plausible rumours, PWE propagandists harnessed rumour as a deliberate form of manipulation to help advance the British political agenda.

Although Spark seems to have accepted the practice of psychological warfare as a necessary evil in the state of exception brought about by the Second World War (see Chapter 2), 'The French Window' illustrates her anxiety about the persistence of disinformation in the subsequent period of the Cold War and after. Spark consistently investigates the spread of rumour as well as related modes of the aphoristic in her novels, drawing attention to how characters respond psychologically to rumours in their attempts to shape their own sense of reality within

[2] I am grateful to Dr. Antonia Perna for drawing my attention to the resonance of the French Revolution in 'The French Window'. See Georges Lefebvre, *The Great Fear of 1789: Rural Panic in Revolutionary France* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2014).

[3] According to Jo Fox, the 'Careless Talk Costs Lives' campaign, as opposed to most domestic propaganda which aimed to create national unity, promoted a culture of 'distrust, suspicion, and fear, where such aspects of "ordinary" life as conversational gossip were presented as dangerous.' See Jo Fox, 'Careless Talk', p. 937. Elizabeth Bowen's short story 'Careless Talk' brilliantly depicts a stilted wartime conversation resulting from citizens' attempts to heed the 'Careless Talk Costs Lives' guidance. See Elizabeth Bowen, *The Demon Lover and Other Stories* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1946), pp. 88-93.

the enclosed environments they inhabit. Despite engaging with both spontaneous and planted rumours, however, Spark makes a stark distinction between them. Spontaneous rumours emerge organically from the population, from the ground up, as provisional answers to questions of significance relating to the lives of individuals that remain unknown or uncertain. Crucially, such rumours are disinterested insofar as individuals do not consciously spread them with any calculated social or political aim. In contrast, planted rumours are deliberately crafted by individuals or institutions seeking to modify the psychology of their recipients with a view to influencing their future behaviour. PWE rumours, purposefully fabricated to deceive the Axis powers, clearly belonged to the latter category.

Drawing on the PWE's use of rumour as a strategy of psychological warfare during the Second World War, the psychology of rumour that underpinned such activity, and the close kinship between rumour and other forms of oral literature such as storytelling, the Scottish ballad and the aphorism, this chapter considers Spark's treatment of four types of rumour: 'folk wisdom' rumour and 'speculative wisdom' rumour – both spontaneous rumours – and 'institutional subversion' rumour and 'reputation assassination' rumour – both planted rumours. I argue that Spark's 'folk wisdom' rumours, freely passed on by Mrs. Hawkins in *A Far Cry from Kensington* and Fleur in *Loitering with Intent*, seek to help her female readers to navigate their personal and professional lives in a world shaped by patriarchal oppression. In doing so, I suggest that Spark actively contributes to the didactic tradition of the novel dating back to Daniel Defoe's *Moll Flanders* (1722). In addition, I contend that Spark's 'speculative wisdom' rumour exposes how unequal power relationships force those in vulnerable social positions to rely on inference to decipher the world around them. This is the case of the servants in *Not to Disturb*, who endlessly hypothesize about the movements of their masters to accurately predict the timing of their death in a continuation of the 'clever servant tradition' developed by Molière under the influence of the *commedia dell'arte*.[4] Like their opportunistic predecessors, whose unequal power requires them to be hypervigilant concerning their masters' whereabouts, the servants' motives are far from disinterested: these modern counterparts intend to commodify and financially exploit their masters' misfortunes, much like the celebrity glossy magazines of the 1970s.

More evidently and directly drawing on her knowledge and experience of psychological warfare at the PWE, I suggest that Spark presents Dougal Douglas as consciously deploying 'institutional subversion' rumours to undermine the power of social and cultural institutions, thereby unsettling the inert lives of the residents of Peckham in *The Ballad of Peckham Rye*. I foreground individual responses to Dougal's rumours, drawing attention to how existing beliefs predispose the inhabitants of Peckham to unconsciously accept tendentious information as truth.

[4] Brian Nelson, *The Cambridge Introduction to French Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), p. 40.

Although Dougal brings a certain degree of insight into the Peckham community but without radically altering its social structures and underpinning cultural beliefs, Spark shows that rumours can overturn authority in a more radical manner. In fact, I argue that Spark's 'reputation assassination' rumour acts as a group management strategy for the creation and destruction of authority within the group in *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie* and *A Far Cry from Kensington*. The PWE was no stranger to the use of rumour to create division in German society and Spark similarly uses the 'reputation assassination' rumour to expose and then expel unethical individuals who pose a threat to the fabric of the enclosed communities they inhabit – as demonstrated by the capitulation of Miss Brodie and the creative fall of Hector Bartlett. A full examination of Spark's depiction of rumourmongering, however, first requires some account of the PWE's uses of rumour, as well as the psychology of rumour that underpinned its strategy, a subject to which I now turn.

1. PWE Rumours and the Psychology of Rumour

Often referred to as whispers or 'sibs' – from the Latin 'sibilare', which means 'to hiss' –, PWE rumours aimed 'to create fear, doubt and confusion in the minds of the enemy, and to make it as difficult as possible for them to distinguish between truth and lie' (*BL*, 59). The history of PWE rumours begins in the summer of 1940, when the Underground Propaganda Committee (UPC) was created 'to formulate, under the tightest secrecy, an anti-invasion whispering campaign'.[5] Before the Dunkirk evacuation (26th May – 4th June 1940), very few rumours had been circulated, and these concerned mainly U-boats, the treatment of old and disabled patients, and economic warfare.[6] However, the Battle of Britain (10th July – 31st October 1940) encouraged the UPC to accelerate the production of rumours, which were now designed 'to mislead the German General Staff into thinking they had to take precautions against nonexistent weapons and to circulate news to the detriment of the morale of the German invasion force'.[7] After the threat of invasion waned, the UPC turned from military deception rumours to propaganda rumours that sought to destroy the morale of the German army and civilians, influence public opinion in the occupied countries, and cause friction between the Axis powers.[8]

The UPC gathered weekly at Woburn Abbey, the headquarters of the Political Warfare Executive, 'to examine whispers put forward by the Joint Intelligence Committee, the Foreign Office, the Service Departments, and PWE Regional Directors, and to arrange for those which

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[5] Lee Richards, *Whispers of War: Underground Propaganda Rumour-Mongering in the Second World War* (Peacehaven, East Sussex: www.psywar.org, 2010), p. 3.
[6] Richards, *Whispers of War*, pp. 5-6.
[7] Richards, *Whispers of War*, p. 6.
[8] Richards, *Whispers of War*, p. 14.

were approved to be put into their final shape'.[9] Such rumours would then be disseminated by SOE agents in the main bars and hotels of the neutral capitals for the attention of German intelligence agents (*BL*, 78). Delmer was not a member of the UPC but received its minutes so that he could ensure that the new whispers did not contradict his own rumour strategy. However, Delmer and his team were also responsible for inventing many rumours that were broadcast by the PWE German-language radio stations (*BB*, 66). For example, *Soldatensender Calais* was able to broadcast approximately ten thousand rumours.[10] Towards the end of the war, most rumours were disseminated via radio broadcasts because they were considered more efficient than word-of-mouth, leading to the decline of the UPC.[11]

The early rumours developed by the UPC were overly complex and far-fetched, and there were so many of them that SOE agents often struggled to spread them.[12] The SOE also complained that UPC rumours lacked a unified strategy, being 'in the nature of scattered pin-pricks rather than attacks planned forcefully against the enemy on a wide scale'.[13] According to David Garnett, the PWE rumour strategy was harmed by the absence of 'a wholetime specialist gifted with the rare combination of a scientific approach and a brilliant imagination' for the successful coordination of rumour campaigns, which created 'a case of "too many cooks spoiling the broth"'.[14] Garnett also laments the PWE's neglect of 'consumer research' as a result of the prioritisation of military rumours, which led to ignorance regarding 'what kinds of rumours and forms of presentation supplied a psychological need and therefore were most acceptable, spread the fastest and were most firmly believed'.[15] For example, PWE agents were not initially allowed to interrogate prisoners of war, even though they were considered a crucial source of intelligence for political warfare, 'being the mirror to the morale that P.W.E and P.W.D. were seeking to destroy' (*BL*, 105). Fortunately, the German-educated Delmer possessed 'a gift granted to few Englishmen, to understand how the German mind worked' and was capable of 'think[ing] not only like a German, but like a Nazi Partei official' (*BL*, 62). Delmer's ability to anticipate how the German authorities would react to PWE rumours was therefore an important asset to the PWE, which may partly account for the greater success of broadcast rumours. Working alongside

[9] Cruikshank, p. 109. Delmer claims that UPC meetings took place 'once a fortnight' (*BB*, 66); however, this is most likely incorrect, as Richards points to the existence of weekly minutes (*Whispers of War*, 24), which supports Cruickshank's account.
[10] Cruickshank, p. 111.
[11] Richards, *Whispers of War*, p. 24.
[12] Cruikshank, pp. 108-9.
[13] FO 898/71, General Index, Correspondence and Reports 1940-45. Allied Propaganda in World War II: The Complete Record of the Political Warfare Executive (FO 898). TNA, UK. *Archives Unbound.* Web. 10. Nov. 2021.
[14] Garnett, p. 213.
[15] Garnett, p. 213.

Delmer, Spark's training in the art of thinking like someone else would prove invaluable in her subsequent career as a novelist.

A PWE lecture on 'Sibs: What they are and How they Work', almost certainly delivered by the former publicist turned propagandist John Baker White in early 1944, outlines the strategic value of rumours for the deception of the enemy.[16] Baker White explains that rumours 'may be designed to make [the enemy] move troops, to undermine the morale of his fighting forces, to destroy the faith of enemy peoples in their leaders, to lower the morale of civilian populations, [and] to confuse and mislead neutrals friendly to the enemy.[17] Since the enemy intelligence services are on the lookout for rumours, the most successful ones often have 'a sub stratum of truth'.[18] Further guidance on the fabrication of rumours is provided by a document circulated to SOE agents in 1942, which claims that rumours must fulfil a 'definite purpose': 'either to produce definite action by the general populace, or a modification in its mental outlook which will produce appropriate action at some later moment'.[19]

Such 'definite action' or 'modification in its mental outlook' must be brought about unconsciously and purport to emerge from the rumour's recipient rather than from external influences. To accomplish this, a successful rumour must have 'an emotional basis in fact', that is, 'it should fit in with the sort of thing which people believe likely or want to happen'.[20] As Garnett astutely notes, '[t]he really good sib is a poisoned sweetmeat – it is sugarcoated and the deadly dose is not immediately evident'.[21] Rumour must gain acceptance by tapping into people's desires before inserting a covert, implied setback intended to cause confusion and fear. By spreading the rumour that the two German claims to have sunk the *Ark Royal* were genuine, for example, the PWE allowed the Germans to boast of two victories while suggesting the fact that other British ships might also have duplicates.[22] In addition to military rumours, successful civilian rumour themes also engaged with, for example, the exposure of women to air raids,

[16] Before the Second World War, Baker White had been 'Director of the Economic League which fights Communism in industry and conducts economic education' (*BL*, 10) and he was also a senior member of the British Fascists. See Graham Macklin, *Failed Führers: A History of Britain's Extreme Right* (London: Routledge, 2020), p. 73. Baker White's account of PWE rumours, unlike those of other former PWE propagandists, is unique insofar as he expresses no moral qualms about his propaganda work.

[17] FO 898/554, 'Sibs: What they are and How they Work', European Intelligence Surveys and Reports. TNA, UK. Transcribed by www.psywar.org. Web. 10. Nov. 2021.

[18] FO 898/554, 'Sibs: What they are and How they Work', European Intelligence Surveys and Reports.

[19] HS 1/332, P.W: Propaganda Policy and Administration; AD/O; Whispers and Rumours; India General; Propaganda Burma; American Plans. TNA, UK. Transcribed by www.psywar.org. Web. 10. Nov. 2021.

[20] HS 1/332, P.W: Propaganda Policy and Administration; AD/O; Whispers and Rumours; India General; Propaganda Burma; American Plans.

[21] Garnett, p. 214.

[22] Garnett, p. 214.

epidemics and factory work, the isolation and difficulties faced by men on the frontline, the incompetence of young soldiers and High Command, the unreliability of weapons, and the growing distrust amongst Germany's allies.[23]

In his memoir *The Big Lie*, Baker White describes how he concocted a very successful rumour which claimed that the British were able to set fire to the sea. Firstly, Baker White had to check that the rumour was 'technically watertight' so that it would appear credible to enemy experts, but he was assured that, 'with a mixture of petrol and oil', setting fire to the sea was 'a perfectly feasible but extravagant and expensive operation' (*BL*, 18). Following security clearance to ensure the rumour did not disclose any strategic information, the UPC eventually approved it despite considering it '"a pretty poor effort"' (*BL*, 18). However, two unexpected events conferred credibility on the rumour. The wounded men from an RAF bombing of a German battalion in an invasion exercise at Calais were sent to hospitals in the Paris region, and in a matter of hours, 'it was all over Paris that the men in the hospitals had been burnt in an abortive attempt at invasion' (*BL*, 19). Additionally, when the Royal Navy captured one of the flak boats in Calais and the Intelligence officer noticed that the men came from different units, a broadcast announcement was made that 'ten soldiers had been brought into Dover […] "rescued from the sea"', drawing attention to the unknown fate of their colleagues, which was followed by 'funeral music from Wagner' (*BL*, 20). Even the German authorities unwittingly enhanced its credibility because, convinced that the British had a means of setting the sea on fire, the failure of their experiments in the fireproofing of barges with asbestos led to the appearance of charred bodies on the French coast (*BL*, 20).

Notwithstanding these favourable coincidences, it is likely that the rumour spread so successfully because it fulfilled an emotional need for the populations of occupied Europe insofar as it kept alive the possibility of a British victory at a time of military inferiority.[24] Significantly, the rumour was subject to the 'boomerang effect' that gives its title to Delmer's second volume of autobiography, for it 'got back to Britain and had […] a wide circulation'; indeed, a naval officer at Portsmouth claimed that he had seen the charred bodies with his own eyes (*BL*, 21-2). Such an anecdote attests to the impossibility of controlling the trajectory and content of rumours once they have been released into the air, pointing to rumour as a potential liability for the propagandist, who remains at risk of accidentally harming their own side. Furthermore, it demonstrates the power of the imagination to shape reality according to unsubstantiated claims that make emotional appeals to their recipients. Indeed, PWE rumours were informed by new social psychology research which would continue into the post-war period, as psychologists

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[23] FO 898/71, General Index, Correspondence and Reports 1940-45.
[24] Garnett, p. 214.

attempted to understand why people engage in the fabrication and dissemination of rumours, often using the Second World War as a case study.

In *The Psychology of Rumor* (1947), for example, Gordon W. Allport and Leo Postman define rumour as '*a specific (or topical) proposition for belief, passed along from person to person, usually by word of mouth, without secure standards of evidence being present*'.[25] They argue that rumours circulate 'when events have importance in the life of individuals and when the news received about them is either lacking or subjectively ambiguous'.[26] Written directly in response to 'the problem of wartime rumors', which were believed to 'sap morale and menace national safety by spreading needless alarm and by raising extravagant hopes', Allport and Postman's study contributed in the post-war period to the popular understanding of rumour as pathological. Indeed, they described rumour as 'invariably a deceptive mode of discourse' affecting the social body which citizens must emphatically guard against.[27] Such a view was an unsurprising legacy of the Second World War since, according to Jo Fox, '[t]he perceived paucity of news on the progress of the war, combined with popular mistrust of government reports and the suggestion that Nazi propaganda broadcasts were supplying withheld information' contributed to the emergence of wartime rumours, which were regarded as a threat to national morale.[28] However, by late 1941-2, Home Intelligence acknowledged that the prevention of rumour-mongering was 'positively undesirable', since rumours offer 'a way of relieving anxiety' and can act as 'useful pointers to the topics which are worrying people', thus providing the state with opportunities for counteracting them.[29]

Allport and Postman focus on examples of rumours that are false; however, rumours are not necessarily untrue. As Jean-Noel Kapferer notes, rumours 'do not *take off* from the truth but rather *seek out* the truth'.[30] Moreover, he takes issue with Allport and Postman's description of rumour as being characterised by unverifiability since 'rumors generally present themselves with all the trappings of ideal verification', purporting to emerge from authoritative sources or eye witnesses.[31] In fact, since rumours are always supposed to originate from someone else, they are able to provide 'a socially acceptable safety valve' for the 'expression of repressed and heretofore

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[25] Gordon W. Allport and Leo Postman, *The Psychology of Rumor* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1947), p. ix.
[26] Allport and Postman, pp. 2-3.
[27] Allport and Postman, p. 167.
[28] Jo Fox, 'Confronting Lord Haw-Haw: Rumor and Britain's Wartime Anti-Lies Bureau', *Journal of Modern History*, 91 (2019), 74-108 (p. 85).
[29] Michael Balfour, *Propaganda in War 1939-1945* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1979), p. 191.
[30] Jean-Noel Kapferer, *Rumors: Uses, Interpretations and Images* (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers, 1990), p. 3.
[31] Kapferer, p. 6.

unavowable drives' such as the overt verbalization of fear.[32] In her study of rumour during the Second World War, Fox explains that '[i]ndividuals' emotional needs, which could not necessarily be met by sharing anxieties given the constraints of the need to share patriotic sentiments, were performed through rumour, which functioned as a means of expression at one remove'.[33] By engaging in rumour-mongering, individuals were able to ward off 'passivity and apathy by regaining some influence and agency in an alienating and limiting environment'.[34] Additionally, rumours possess 'commodity value' because the information they carry 'loses value with time', so people's drive to 'maximize the return they expect from this exchange behaviour' – e.g. the relief of their anxieties, the diminishment of their cognitive dissonance through confirmation bias or the attainment of higher social status within their communities – often accounts for the speed of rumour transmission.[35] Kapferer and Fox thus provide more nuanced conceptualizations of rumour-mongering as an instinctive social phenomenon emerging whenever individuals attempt to piece together answers to unexplained situations that concern them.

In her study, Fox draws on the work of the sociologist Tamotsu Shibutani, who has defined rumour as 'a recurrent form of *communication through which men caught together in an ambiguous situation attempt to construct a meaningful interpretation of it by pooling their intellectual resources*'.[36] Drawing on analysis of Second World War rumours that sought to frame the Japanese living in San Francisco as enemy agents, Shibutani presents rumour as 'a form of collective problem-solving', characterised by a 'lower degree of formalization' which allows 'opportunities for spontaneity, expediency, and improvisation' away from institutional frameworks.[37] Consequently, Shibutani believes that rumour shows potential for acting as a democratising force insofar as it enables individuals in vulnerable social positions to construct alternative narratives to those provided by the state or other social elites. In doing so, rumour formation can be seen as 'a cathartic process' which 'provide[s] opportunities for the camouflaged expression of suppressed attitudes'.[38]

Despite acknowledging the fact that rumours can be planted for ulterior motives, Shibutani maintains that 'proposals are not accepted unless they reflect the developing mood'; in other words, 'an agitator can succeed only if he gives fitting expression to what is already "in the

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32 Kapferer, p. 46.
33 Fox, 'Confronting Lord Haw-Haw', p. 95.
34 Fox, 'Confronting Lord Haw-Haw', pp. 97-8.
35 Kapferer, p. 53.
36 Tamotsu Shibutani, *Improvised News: A Sociological Study of Rumor* (Indianapolis, IN: Bobbs-Merrill, 1966), p. 17.
37 Shibutani, p. 23.
38 Shibutani, p. 87.

air"'.[39] Just like spontaneous rumours, planted rumours must gain traction among the public, who operate as 'a gatekeeper, preserving only those rumours deemed the most politically significant or compelling', if they are to be successfully disseminated.[40] Shibutani suggests that the creation of rumours provides 'an indication of independent judgement and of the unwillingness of men to accept passively formally approved definitions', thereby revealing their potential for subverting institutional narratives.[41] In fact, far from acting as passive vehicles for the spread of improvised news, rumours can also play an active role as a mechanism of control within the social group. As the anthropologist Max Gluckman notes, rumour can serve both to consolidate and/or destroy authority, thereby signalling or reinforcing belonging to or exclusion from the social group.[42]

Spark's fiction often recognises the potential of rumour as a mode of verbal communication arising spontaneously within a community whenever an event remains unexplained or unclear. Nevertheless, it also exhibits a lingering anxiety that such a social phenomenon arising from the human need for 'collective problem-solving' may be hijacked for the spread of disinformation aiming to modify public behaviour in the service of individuals or institutions. Such anxiety, I suggest, stems from her involvement in wartime propaganda as part of the PWE, an organisation which was precisely tasked with the creation and dissemination of deceptive rumours to Germany and German-occupied countries. In the sections that follow, I argue that Spark's fictional representation of rumourmongering performs the opposite role: it undermines the core of psychological warfare by providing 'the unsettling truth rather than strategic lies, piercing rather than manufacturing a fabric of delusional beliefs'.[43]

2. 'Free of Charge': The Folk Wisdom Rumour in *A Far Cry from Kensington* and *Loitering with Intent*

Rumour is closely associated with the aphorism, since both are oral forms which gain acceptance through repetition. Described as 'a short statement which encapsulates a truth', the aphorism paradoxically asks a question whilst seeming to establish a truth as unquestionable.[44] Like rumour, the aphorism is both aligned with information and lived experience, having become 'the modern analogue of the story' in the Information Age.[45] Aphorisms offer snippets of practical information as immutable, long-term wisdom intended to help individuals navigate uncharted waters. Unlike rumours, however, aphorisms are 'attributed to a named individual' whose creations share a '"a

[39] Shibutani, p. 197.
[40] David Coast and Jo Fox, 'Rumour and Politics', *History Compass*, 13 (2015), 222-34 (p. 228).
[41] Shibutani, p. 212.
[42] See Max Gluckman, 'Gossip and Scandal', *Current Anthropology*, 4 (1963), 307-16.
[43] Simon Cooke, 'A "world of method and intrigue": Muriel Spark's Literary Intelligence', *Modernist Cultures*, 16 (2021), 488-508 (p. 494).
[44] Ben Grant, *The Aphorism and Other Short Forms* (London: Routledge, 2016), p. 1.
[45] Grant, p. 128.

common attitude towards the world" […] as a signature motif'.[46] No wonder that Spark, a writer most distrustful of unattributed speech or writing (see Chapter 4), would be drawn to this literary form. In 'Muriel Spark and Self-Help', Marina Mackay observes that 'Spark's career-long attention to aphorisms and axioms has gone critically unremarked', a tendency ascribed to the modern view of the novel as a stylistic rather than didactic literary form.[47] Nevertheless, far from rending her as 'a novelist out of her own time', Spark's adoption of the aphorism makes her highly relevant to our contemporary times.[48] Building on Mackay's argument that 'Spark's fiction shows a[n] […] everyday concern with practical wisdom', this section will explore Spark's use of aphoristic phrases – what I call the 'folk wisdom' rumour – for the transmission of knowledge to the reader in her novels, drawing on examples from *A Far Cry from Kensington* and *Loitering with Intent*.

A Far Cry from Kensington is primarily a novel about the transmission of counsel. Mrs. Hawkins, an editor at the publishing house Mackintosh & Tooley, confesses that she has 'always been free with advice' (*FCK*, 75). Indeed, the novel is littered with all sorts of practical recommendations on dieting, job hunting and working life, creative writing, cats, and marriage, as well as on how to decline requests and confront trouble. As a woman 'massive in size, strong-muscled, huge-bosomed, with wide hips, hefty long legs, a bulging belly and fat backside' who becomes thin towards the end of the novel, Mrs. Hawkins recommends that you 'eat and drink the same as always, only half' if you wish to lose weight (*FCK*, 6). 'When you are looking for a job', Mrs. Hawkins claims that 'the best thing to do is to tell everyone, high and humble, and keep reminding them please to look out for you' (*FCK*, 58). Upon securing employment, Mrs. Hawkins' advice to 'any woman who earns the reputation of being capable, is to not demonstrate her ability too much' (*FCK*, 121). When discussing novel writing, Mrs. Hawkins suggests that, if you want to write a novel but don't know how to start, you should imagine that '[y]ou are writing a letter to a friend' (*FCK*, 77). And if you are seeking the ability 'to concentrate deeply on some problem, and especially some piece of writing or paper-work, you must acquire a cat' (*FCK*, 86). When entering a marriage, Mrs. Hawkins recommends that women 'should first see the other partner when drunk' and that they should 'start, not as [they] mean to go on, but worse, tougher, than [they] mean to go on' (*FCK*, 108-9). Mrs. Hawkins also cautions that 'when you have to refuse any request that admits of no argument, you should never give reasons or set out your objections; to do so leads to counter-reasons and counter-objections' (*FCK*, 114). Finally, when in trouble, Mrs. Hawkins urges the reader 'to go to Paris for a few days' (*FCK*, 162). All these snippets of wisdom – the transmission of which Benjamin thought lost in the novel form – emerge

[46] Grant, p. 67.
[47] Marina Mackay, 'Muriel Spark and Self-Help', *Textual Practice*, 32 (2018), 1563-76 (p. 1573).
[48] Mackay, 'Muriel Spark and Self-Help', p. 1573.

from Mrs. Hawkins' own personal experience and are intended by her to disseminate counsel of significance to future generations, especially those of women.

Such 'folk wisdom' rumours enable the transmission of practical knowledge intended to orient the reader too, sourced from 'the recalcitrant and fragmentary materials of isolated lives' which are unified in the novel through the agency of Mrs. Hawkins' memory as she looks back on and scrutinises the events of her youth.[49] Unlike the other types of rumour discussed in this chapter, the 'folk wisdom' rumour is unique insofar as it draws on experience to influence the future and imparts long-term general truths rather than short-term practical orientation. Mrs. Hawkins might indeed be considered a modern successor to Moll Flanders, the indomitable female protagonist of Defoe's novel of the same name, who takes pains to advise the ladies against rushing into marriage without 'enquiring into [a man's] Person or Character', for 'would the Ladies consider this, and act the wary Part, they would discover every Cheat that offer'd […] and if the Ladies do but make a little Enquiry, they will soon be able to distinguish the Men and deliver themselves' without risking financial betrayal.[50] Mrs. Hawkins similarly advices Mr. Lederer – the father of her young fellow tenant Isobel – that his daughter should not go into publishing because '[t]he secretaries are underpaid; everyone's underpaid', thus signalling Mrs. Hawkins' financially precarious position and her wish to save young women from hardship (or familial dependency). Mrs. Hawkins' 'folk wisdom' rumours are therefore primarily driven by her desire to offer life experience to those as yet uninitiated into its ways.

Crucially, Mrs. Hawkins' 'folk wisdom' rumours are characterised by their disinterestedness. Not only does Mrs. Hawkins refrain from forcing them on other characters or the reader, but she actively foregrounds the fact that, unlike the self-help books that proliferated at the mid-century, she is content to pass on advice without any regard to financial compensation. Indeed, she takes pride in offering general 'advice without fee; it is included in the price of this book' and her creative writing recommendations also come 'free of charge' (*FCK*, 7, 77). However, as an employee of a publishing business, Mrs. Hawkins is quick to acknowledge the potential monetary value of her 'folk wisdom' rumours. According to Rita Barnard, the popular magazines of the 1930s contained many advertisements packed with practical guidance, suggesting that 'advice, stories, and the speaking voice far from being on the decline', as Walter Benjamin suggested in 'The Storyteller' (1936), 'had in fact become a growth industry'.[51] Barnard

[49] Rita Barnard, 'The Storyteller, the Novelist, and the Advice Columnist: Narrative and Mass Culture in "Miss Lonelyhearts"', *NOVEL: A Forum on Fiction*, 27 (1993), 40-61 (p. 55).
[50] Daniel Defoe, *Moll Flanders* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), pp. 63-4.
[51] Walter Benjamin, 'The Storyteller: Reflections on the Works of Nikolai Leskov', in *Illuminations: Essays and Reflections*, ed. by Hannah Arendt and trans. by Harry Zorn (London: Pimlico, 1999), pp. 83-107; Barnard, p. 44.

contends that 'the value of experience did not, in fact, fall straight into "bottomlessness" […] but that personal experience, as well as old-fashioned advice, was instead resuscitated – sublated if you will – in a corporate and commodified guise'.[52] Such commodification of personal experience is evident in the posthumous publication of Spark's collected aphorisms in *A Good Comb*. By dispensing complimentary advice, however, Mrs. Hawkins demonstrates the potential of the 'folk wisdom' rumour to evade commodification and provide social cohesion amid the increasing alienation of the modern age.

Much like Mrs. Hawkins, Fleur Talbot also adopts the 'folk wisdom' rumour as a vehicle for the casual expression of guidance in *Loitering with Intent*. Already a confident woman writer at the mid-century, Fleur relishes sharing with readers 'the secrets of [her] craft' to the extent that the novel in which she prominently features becomes in part a kind of masterclass in creative writing: 'to make a character ring true', Fleur advises, 'it needs must be in some way contradictory, somewhere a paradox' (*LI*, 27). Unlike her friend Dottie, who recurrently utters moralistic platitudes such as 'Your head rules your heart' or 'Pride goes before a fall' that are intended to move Fleur to modify her behaviour, Fleur's 'folk wisdom' rumours more closely resemble Mrs. Hawkins' insofar as they are devoid of ulterior motive, simply seeking to convey her joyful embracement of an artistic life that had long been denied to women of her class (*LI*, 17). Yet Fleur's circumstances are still far from glamorous: she starts the novel unemployed, barely able to afford the rent for her overcrowded single room bed-sit and owing debts to various bookshops. However, drawing assuredly on her own experiences of hardship as a struggling writer, Fleur becomes a democratic 'expert by experience', providing both practical advice to budding writers on how to craft fiction and to readers on how to critically interpret it. Fleur's recommendation that fiction, instead of embracing frankness, should turn life 'into some other experience' that is only recognisable to the artist, in fact jeopardises the mission of the Autobiographical Association and exposes Sir Quentin's desire to instrumentalise such frankness with the aim of blackmailing its members (*LI*, 114).

Furthermore, Fleur's 'folk wisdom' resonates beyond *Loitering with Intent*, as it draws on the relationships between characters in a fiction and people in reality to instruct the reader on how to navigate the novel they are holding in their hands. Indeed, Fleur's fictional pursuits in *Warrender Chase* throw light on the personalities of the characters in *Loitering with Intent*, thus encouraging us to distrust and denounce the seemingly 'very reassuring' Sir Quentin and his 'sweet' housekeeper Beryl Tims, as described by Dottie (*LI*, 47). During her time at Milton Bryan, Spark herself similarly felt 'the need to "give experience". […] [She] wanted to offer more of

[52] Barnard, p. 44.

[her] own personality than hitherto, and give something of the same effect of "experience" that [she] had received' to her readers, though she still lacked the confidence to do so (*CV*, 154-5). Much as Fleur's unpleasant experience working alongside 'Sir Quentin and his little sect' would become a subject for fiction – in her own words, 'the straws from which I've made my bricks' – Spark would go on to fictionalise her own lived experience as a white settler in Africa, a struggling writer in London or an established artist in Italy, often adopting satire to combat racism, classism, and blackmail, and elicit critical responses from her readers (*LI*, 150).

Both *A Far Cry from Kensington* and *Loitering with Intent* are concerned with the educative function of art and firmly position the novel as the most democratic form of literature. In his essay 'Charles Dickens' (1939), George Orwell claimed that 'every writer, especially every novelist, *has* a 'message', whether he admits or not', and Spark, deeply aware of her role as purveyor of such a 'message', continues the novelistic tradition of didacticism that characterised the emergence of the novel as a literary form.[53] As Mackay notes, the early novel was conceived as an educational vehicle intended to impart moral truths to the reader; however, by the late 19th century, 'there was something virtually unspeakable about the idea that the novel, now attaining the status of a legitimate art form, could be a form of wisdom literature', and in this, signalling its movement away from didacticism towards style.[54] Without demeaning the significance of authorial style, Spark, however, seems to have believed that a writer cannot fully succeed 'unless [they] can persuade and give delight and pleasure' (MC, 27). She would later elaborate on this recognition of the ways in which the pleasurable and the rhetorical are bound together in the reading and writing of fiction, admitting further that, to a certain extent, 'all art is propaganda since it propagates a point of view and provokes a response' (DA, 36).

In his essay 'Why I Write' (1946), Orwell – formerly a wartime propagandist at the BBC – had reintroduced the argument that the novel fulfils a social purpose, claiming that his starting point is 'always a feeling of partisanship, a sense of injustice' – more concretely, a desire to combat totalitarianism and promote democratic Socialism.[55] Yet writing, Orwell argues, is as much a political as 'an aesthetic experience', concerned with 'much that a full-time politician

[53] George Orwell, 'Charles Dickens', in *George Orwell: Down and Out in Paris and London; The Road to Wigan Pier; Homage to Catalonia; Essays and journalism, 1931- ... 1949* (London: Secker & Warburg/Octopus, 1980 [1939]), pp. 443-76 (p. 468).
[54] Marina Mackay, 'Muriel Spark and Self-Help', pp. 1572-3; Leah Price, *The Anthology and the Rise of the Novel: From Richardson to George Eliot* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), pp. 6-7.
[55] George Orwell, 'Why I Write', in *George Orwell: Down and Out in Paris and London; The Road to Wigan Pier; Homage to Catalonia; Essays and journalism, 1931- ... 1949* (London: Secker & Warburg/Octopus, 1980 [1946]), pp. 749-54 (p. 753).

would consider irrelevant'.[56] Orwell thus refuses to conflate art with propaganda; although he believes that '[a]ll art is propaganda', he acknowledges that 'not all propaganda is art'.[57] Reacting against the modernist insistence on detaching literature from overtly propagandistic, moralistic, or didactic purposes, seemingly advocated by writers such as Virginia Woolf, James Joyce or Ford Madox Ford, Spark joins fellow woman writer and former propagandist Rose Macaulay in insisting again on the social purpose of the novel.[58] In this context, Spark's adoption of the 'folk wisdom' rumour may be seen as a means of negotiating the tension between fulfilling a political purpose – broadly understood, in Orwell's words, as 'alter[ing] other people's idea of the kind of society that they should strive after' – and sharing an aesthetic experience with the reader.[59]

Unlike other types of rumour populating Spark's writing, the 'folk wisdom' rumour is an aphoristic form endowed with the capacity to transmit enduring, rather than topical, knowledge. Indeed, the 'folk wisdom' rumours crafted by Mrs. Hawkins and Fleur remain durable sources of advice throughout the novels. Conversely, PWE rumours concerning the everyday life of enemy and occupied populations – for example, those creating anxieties about food supplies and epidemics – were primarily topical, or at least seasonal, triggered by the strategic needs of Britain at different stages of the Second World War. In his lecture on 'Sibs: What they are and How they Work', for example, Baker White highlights the significance of research for the invention of rumour, warning the would-be propagandist that '[t]yphus is always a good card to play, only don't try to play it outside a typhus area or in the wrong season. The typhus season is November to March'.[60] Failure to comply with such demand for topicality could be fatal, as Jane Wright discovers the hard way when addressing a forged letter to a famous dead writer (see Chapter 4). Unlike PWE propaganda, Spark's 'folk wisdom' rumours aim, much like fiction itself, to open rather than close 'windows in the mind' (DA, 36). They aim to resonate, like all great art, for Spark, beyond the immediate historical confines of the production of the book.

[56] Orwell, 'Why I Write', p. 753.
[57] Orwell, 'Charles Dickens', p. 468.
[58] James Purdon argues that 'Macaulay offers a non-modernist – or an intermodernist – alternative to the modernist reaction against propaganda', presenting literature as not entirely dissimilar from propaganda. This was a marginal view at the time and would only become more widely accepted following the Second World War. See James Purdon, 'Rose Macaulay and Propaganda', *Modernist Cultures*, 16 (2021), 449-68 (p. 451).
[59] Orwell, 'Why I Write', p. 751.
[60] FO 898/554, 'Sibs: What they are and How they Work', European Intelligence Surveys and Reports.

3. 'There Might Be an Unexpected Turn of Events': The Speculative Wisdom Rumour in *Not to Disturb*

In *Not to Disturb*, the Baron and Baroness Klopstock are expected to die during the night. Their servants, who have painstakingly prepared to sell the anticipated tragedy to the media, already consider them deceased, describing them as mere ghosts who 'haunt the house […] like insubstantial bodies, while still alive' (*ND*, 19). Whereas the butler Lister expresses no doubt that his masters will die tonight, having 'placed themselves, unfortunately, within the realm of predestination', his fellow servant Eleanor, however, concedes that '[t]here might be an unexpected turn of events' (*ND*, 33, 5). In fact, the servants carefully monitor the whereabouts of their masters to ensure that no unforeseen events derail their foretold death. Much to their chagrin, however, they are forced to cope with the unexpected arrival of the Reverend and the friends of Victor Passerat – the Klopstock's young secretary and lover – who threaten to disturb the altercation between the Baron, the Baroness and Victor Passerat since, as Eleanor warns, '[a]ny break into the meeting might distract them from the quarrel and side-track the climax' (*ND*, 25). To manage such uncertainties from their inferior social position, the servants can be seen to adopt the role of rumourmongers, seeking to keep abreast of their masters' situation through collective inference – what I call 'speculative wisdom' rumour – rather than official communications. In doing so, they position rumour as a form of 'counter-power' that contests their masters' status as 'the sole source authorized to speak' and allows them to subvert the established power relations.[61] Such an inversion of power relations mirrors the relationship between citizens and the state during the Second World War, as individuals could be seen to engage in rumourmongering as part of a collective attempt to understand significant events that remained unexplained by the state and the media, or whose explanations were distrusted by the public.

According to Martin Stannard, the idea for *Not to Disturb* emerged from 'a widely reported multiple Italian murder involving a Count, his wife, their mutual lover and voyeurism'.[62] However, Spark's desire to focus on the servants rather than the masters appears to have been animated by her own employment of a manservant who ended up abandoning his post and 'suing [Spark] for unfair dismissal'.[63] No wonder that, in an archival note, Spark would describe servants as people 'watching to find a habit pattern in order to exploit it; as animal hunters, mothers, robbers and *military tacticians* do (my emphasis)'.[64] Drawing attention to the commodification of rumour in modern society, Lister admits that '[t]he popular glossy magazines have replaced

[61] Kapferer, p. 14.
[62] Stannard, *Muriel* Spark, p. 373.
[63] Stannard, *Muriel Spark*, pp. 373-4.
[64] Box 28, Folder 10, *The Hothouse by the East River*, 'Plot, Form and Style', n.d., Muriel Spark Papers, McFarlin Library, University of Tulsa (USA).

the servants' hall', leading to their necessary reliance on the media to profit from their masters' eagerly anticipated demise. In fact, the hasty preparation of a serialization contract and film script – even before the Klopstock's have passed away – foregrounds the commodity value of rumour, which prompts the servants to exploit the news of their masters' death before it loses its value.

Much like the Klopstock's servants and the parasitic media, which spread rumour and scandal in order to profit from the fascination of the powerless with the powerful, PWE propagandists were also aware that 'a story travels better if it is tied up with topical events', and that '[a] scandal about the great' is a subject that 'will make a rumour pleasurable to repeat', regardless of whether the facts are true.[65] Unlike news, which is verified by journalists, rumours are verified by the people who listen to them and decide whether to pass them on. A guidance document for the creation of rumours circulated to SOE agents in 1942 explains that, since '[r]umours are mainly disseminated by people in low positions', '[a]nything that bolsters up their pride by telling them that those in high positions are no better than they ought to be will always be popular'.[66] Such a statement resonates strongly with *Not to Disturb*, a novel in which the servants highlight the sexual scandal that precipitates their masters' death – the disclosure that Victor Passerat is the lover of *both* the Baron and the Baroness – in order to facilitate the spread of the story. Furthermore, the sexual scandal will be subjected to 'biased assimilation' – the idea that 'people process information in a way that fits with their own predilections' – thus possibly confirming the existing lower- and middle-class belief in the unworthiness of the declining aristocracy.[67] By providing those in inferior social positions with exclusive knowledge of upper-class affairs, the servant's 'speculative wisdom' rumour could be seen to fulfil a democratising function not dissimilar from that of PWE rumours. However, whereas PWE rumours covertly sought to undermine National Socialism with the aim of shortening the Second World War, the servants' 'speculative wisdom' rumours overtly sought to commodify their masters' misfortune for their own financial gain.

Despite Lister's conviction that '[t]o all intents and purposes, they're already dead', the timing of the Klopstock's death remains highly contested (*ND*, 8). Placing this event in the past rather than the future, Lister notes that the Baron 'expected his dinner', yet 'as things turned out he didn't live to eat it' (*ND*, 4). However, whereas he expects 'the event at about three a.m.', urging the servants to stay awake until it takes place, Heloise more conservatively predicts it for

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[65] HS 1/332, P.W: Propaganda Policy and Administration; AD/O; Whispers and Rumours; India General; Propaganda Burma; American Plans.
[66] HS 1/332, P.W: Propaganda Policy and Administration; AD/O; Whispers and Rumours; India General; Propaganda Burma; American Plans.
[67] Cass R. Sunstein, *On Rumour: How Falsehoods Spread, Why We Believe Them, and What Can Be Done* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2014), p. 46.

'six-ish in the morning' because '[o]nce they start arguing it could drag on all night' (*ND*, 5, 14). Such disagreement as to the precise time of the Klopstock's death, which acknowledges the potential intrusion of unforeseen circumstances, is accompanied by the obsessive surveillance of the actions that are expected to seamlessly conduce to their much-anticipated demise. In the Klopstock's drawing room, Lister and Eleanor can hear their masters' voices because they are 'arguing in high note' – a signal that they still live and the murder has not yet taken place' (*ND*, 23). Using a nail file to dislodge pieces of parquet, Eleanor is able to eavesdrop on them, reporting that '[a]ll she heard from down there […] was something like "You said…" – "No you did not. I said…" – "No, you did say…" That means they're going over it all, Lister. It could take all night' (*ND*, 24-5).

The accomplishment of the night's business is further complicated by the arrival of the Reverend, who has been summoned by Sister Barton – the carer of the Baron's mad brother who inhabits the attic. According to Lister, 'Sister Barton did wrong to bring you out, Reverend, but I must say I'm relieved to see you, and it just occurs to me after all, she may have done right' (*ND*, 43). Following Eleanor's discovery that the madman in the attic is the Baron's younger brother and heir, the servants quickly decide to marry him off to the pregnant servant Eloise in order to safeguard their right to the Klopstock fortune. So, the Reverend, initially regarded as an unwanted intruder into the crime scene, becomes instrumental for officiating the marriage, suggesting that seemingly circumstantial events might actually be part of a preordained plan. In contrast, the persistent plot interruptions of Victor Passerat's friends – the so-called 'extras' who demand access to the Klopstock library and are eventually trapped by the servants in the grounds of the Klopstock residence – are presented as wholly unproductive to the extent that the omniscient narrator mercilessly kills them off in a lightning storm, thus enabling the Klopstock's dispute to escalate into the impending murder.[68] Be that as it may, the servants remain wary of the potential seeping of the accidental into the predestined, which compels them to craft 'speculative wisdom' rumours to reach insights that can help them navigate their still precarious circumstances.

Although the present remains uncertain as long as the Klopstocks are alive, the future has been carefully arranged to ensure that the servants can secure their wealth. Much like a PWE

[68] Spark's research materials for *The Hothouse by the East River*, preserved at the McFarlin Library (University of Tulsa, USA), contain various scholarly publications on atmospheric physics, particularly on lighting stroke, since she originally intended to 'have someone electrocuted down a telephone line.' However, Spark also had personal experience of electric shock because, on 12 June 2000, a thunderbolt struck her Oliveto home, 'sending parts of the small belfry crashing through the tiles into Muriel's bath. Had she been in it, she would have been killed.' When later recalling this incident, Spark seemed 'somehow intrigued by the experience.' See Stannard, *Muriel Spark*, p. 521.

propagandist, Lister adopts the methods of psychological warfare to invent a fake alibi designed to clear the servants of any suspicion of murder. For a start, Lister's tape recording of his reaction to his masters' death – contrived in advance of their demise – resembles PWE propaganda insofar as it cunningly blends invented news with 'hard news which the listener could verify for himself', making it 'almost impossible to sort the wheat from the chaff'.[69] For example, his allegation that they did not hear the shots because 'the shutters upstairs are somewhat loose and in fact [they] were to have them seen to tomorrow afternoon' appears credible, since the shutters are indeed loose. However, we soon learn that the servant Pablo had purposefully 'loosed those shutters really good' in order to corroborate Lister's fraudulent story (*ND*, 39, 49). This example further reinforces my argument that Spark's fiction recurrently exposes the use of fabricated evidence to back up deceptions (see Chapter 1) – a feature of her literary work that was undoubtedly inspired by her experience of psychological warfare at the PWE.

As Spark was well aware, the more plausible a rumour appears to the enemy, the more chances that the rumour will be successfully disseminated. In *The Big Lie*, Baker White reflects on the importance of plausibility for the concoction of successful rumours. He recalls that the PWE once put out a rumour that 'the Gestapo was cancelling all Service leave to heavily bombed towns', a piece of news which seemed supported by the fact that 'on certainly two occasions the authorities did cancel leave' (*BL*, 106). The PWE thus used such historical precedents to discourage Germans from seeking confirmatory evidence, leading them to believe in their fabricated rumour. Conversely, Spark's fictional exposure of the psychology of rumour aims to instil distrust of unverified information and encourage critical thinking for the assessment of dubious claims.

Not to Disturb stages what Frank Kermode describes as 'the conflict between the deterministic pattern any plot suggests, and the freedom of persons within that plot to choose and so to alter the structure, the relations of beginning, middle, and end'.[70] Living in an uncertain 'middle' that is expected to culminate in a fated 'end', the servants consistently rely on 'speculative wisdom' rumour to gain provisional knowledge that will guide them through their precarious present until the Klopstock eventually meet their fate. Since propaganda is future-oriented, seeking to bring about a definite and strategic action or a modification of behaviour that might lead to such action, PWE propagandists similarly crafted rumours in the 'middle', in the expectation that they would successfully fulfil a desired 'end'. The narrative imaging that the 'speculative wisdom' rumour enables in fact constitutes a means of 'looking into the future, of predicting, of planning, and of explaining' that is fundamental to human cognition.[71] In *Not to*

[69] Cruickshank, p. 111.
[70] Kermode, *Sense of an Ending*, p. 30.
[71] Mark Turner, *The Literary Mind* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), pp. 4-5.

Disturb, Spark draws on her PWE experience to reveal how this innate human desire for meaning can be instrumentalised by individuals or institutions seeking to influence public opinion for their own social or political ends. This is most evident in the 'planted' rumour, to which I now turn.

4. 'Take Monday Off': The Institutional Subversion Rumour in *The Ballad of Peckham Rye*

The orality of rumour brings it into close kinship with literary forms such as storytelling and the Scottish Border ballad, which rely on the story form as 'the fundamental instrument of thought' to explain the present and predict the future.[72] In his seminal essay 'The Storyteller' (1936), Walter Benjamin claims that 'the art of storytelling is coming to an end' because, since the rise of the novel, we seem to have lost 'the ability to exchange experiences'.[73] Whereas the storyteller draws on the experiences of others to provide practical 'counsel for his reader', Benjamin argues that the novelist 'is himself uncounselled, and cannot counsel others'; far from fulfilling a didactic purpose, the novel simply testifies to 'the profound perplexity of the living'.[74] Furthermore, Benjamin associates the decline of storytelling with the emergence of information as the preeminent source of knowledge in modern society. Unlike stories, information 'lays claim to prompt verifiability', so it must 'sound plausible' and fully account for the connections between events; Benjamin thus suggests that information does not allow interpretation, and consequently, is less likely to move listeners to thoughtfulness.[75]

By examining storytelling alongside rumour, the shortcomings of Benjamin's thesis become apparent. Like storytelling, rumour is unverifiable and seeks provisional wisdom intended to orient the listener in uncertain situations; in doing so, it can be seen to provide, to a certain extent, the 'counsel' that Benjamin cannot locate in the novel. Both stories and rumours require collective interpretation, being shaped by the unique input of every individual who chooses to pass them on. However, the tendency of rumours to 'present themselves with all the trappings of ideal verification' also signals their aspiration to enter the realm of information.[76] Rumour can therefore be seen as a hybrid form standing at a crossroads between storytelling and fact; it is a provisional and endlessly recreated narrative which lays claim to empirical verification.

In an interview with S.M. Craig, Spark explained that the idea for *The Ballad of Peckham Rye* came to her in the form of a Scottish Border ballad:

[72] Turner, p. 4.
[73] Benjamin, 'The Storyteller', p. 83.
[74] Benjamin, 'The Storyteller', pp. 86-7.
[75] Benjamin, 'The Storyteller', p. 89.
[76] Kapferer, p. 6.

> The environment of Peckham […] did strike me as containing all the elements of the ballads […] from the Border Ballads, folk ballads and the modern type of ballad. And I wanted it to be lyrical and at the same time a bit savage and a bit stark.[77]

Like rumours, ballads tend to focus on the 'emotional core' of stories rather than on narrative elements and are passed on from an anonymous original source through multiple storytellers and collectors, each of whom puts their own 'personal stamp' in a collaborative effort to share communal experience.[78] However, whereas ballads recreate otherworldly stories in order to impart general truths on new generations of listeners, rumours tend to elaborate on unverified information that seeks to make truth claims concerning ongoing events. Overall, the newsworthiness and plausibility of rumours serves to distinguish them from ballads, even though both oral forms intend to offer a kind of guidance to the listener, be it in the short or long term. In *Curriculum Vitae*, Spark notes that her fascination with the Scottish Border ballad, which dates back to her childhood, remains a powerful influence on her literary style: 'I was reading the Border ballads so repetitively and attentively that I memorized many of them without my noticing it. The steel and bite of the ballads, so remorseless and yet so lyrical, entered my literary bloodstream, never to depart' (*CV*, 98).

By the time Spark became a celebrated novelist, the Scottish folk revival, led by the poet and ballad collector Hamish Henderson, was underway. Undermining the notion of authenticity, Henderson viewed the Scottish Border ballads or folk songs as inherently malleable because 'they begin to take on a life of their own – start shedding some things, accruing others – generally taking on a new and changing form'.[79] Therefore, folk songs, much like rumours, are able to offer a perceptive reflection of 'people's response to the experience of living together', which is 'necessarily in a constant state of flux'.[80] Furthermore, folk songs resemble rumours insofar as they signify 'the cultural presence of the dispossessed', being characterised by 'their dissent towards dominant ideological structures'; in particular, Scottish folk songs often embrace satirical humour as a means of 'punctur[ing] the hypocritical, the authoritative and the domineering'.[81] This dimension of the Scottish folk song resonates strongly with Spark's own approach to fiction writing, as set out in 'The Desegregation of Art'. As previously discussed, this essay advocates

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[77] Muriel Spark's radio interview with S.M. Craig, quoted in Martin Stannard, 'The Crooked Ghost: *The Ballad of Peckham Rye* and the Idea of the "Lyrical"', *Textual Practice*, 32 (2018), 1529-43 (p. 1536).
[78] Emily Lyle, Valentina Bold and Ian Russell, 'Genre', in *The Edinburgh Companion to Scottish Traditional Literatures*, ed. by Sarah Dunnigan and Suzanne Gilbert (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press), pp. 14-26 (pp. 14-6).
[79] Hamish Henderson, quoted in Timothy Neat, *Hamish Henderson: A Biography – Volume 2: Poetry Becomes People (1952–2002)* (Edinburgh: Polygon, 2009), p. 368.
[80] Corey Gibson, 'The Politics of the Modern Scottish Folk Revival', in *The Edinburgh Companion to Scottish Traditional Literatures*, ed. by Sarah Dunnigan and Suzanne Gilbert (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press), pp. 134-44 (p. 137).
[81] Gibson, pp. 138-9.

'the arts of satire and of ridicule' – characterised by 'a more deliberate cunning, a more derisive undermining of what is wrong' – which she views as the primary means of carving a socio-political role for the novel beyond the sentimental tradition of socially-conscious art (DA, 35).

In *The Ballad of Peckham Rye*, Spark exposes the close alliance between storytelling and rumour by adopting the Scottish Border ballad form and introducing a storyteller-like protagonist – Dougal Douglas – who deploys 'institutional subversion' rumours to satirise ordinary behaviour and bring insight into the Peckham community. Stannard has astutely suggested that the novel 'employs the humour of euphemism at the expense of those avoiding the starkness of the truth', casting Dougal as 'an image of the novelist' entrusted with guiding characters towards such truth'.[82] Without contradicting Stannard, I want to argue that Dougal's consistent spread of 'institutional subversion' rumours is deliberately designed to undermine the characters' deeply held beliefs, shaking them out of their routines to encourage more reflective ways of living. In doing so, Dougal illustrates the power of rumour to bond communities by uncovering the value systems of its members, as well as the affective relationships between them. I suggest that Spark draws on her knowledge and experience of psychological warfare to cast Dougal in the role of subversive rumourmonger.

From its first chapter, *The Ballad of Peckham Rye* is framed by the rumours arising in response to an unexplained event: Humphrey and Dixie were standing at the altar and the vicar asked the bridegroom 'Wilt thou have this woman to thy wedded wife?', to which he answered, 'No […] to be quite frank I won't' (*BPR*, 2). Indeed, the inhabitants of Peckham quickly put their heads together and elaborate on this factual story with the aim of ascertaining the reason for Humphrey's unexpected behaviour, which is already widely blamed on the malicious influence of the newcomer Dougal. Consequently, rumours become rife in Peckham until public interest in the matrimonial affair wanes and the conflicting accounts solidify into a local legend:

> Some say the bridegroom came back repentant and married the girl in the end. Some say, no, he married another girl, while the bride married the best man. It is wondered if the bride had been carrying on with the best man for some time past. It is sometimes told that the bride died of grief and the groom shot himself on the Rye. It is generally agreed that he answered "No" at his wedding, that he went away alone on his wedding day and turned up again later (*BPR*, 8).

As this example demonstrates, Spark recognises the potential of the 'speculative wisdom' rumour as a spontaneous form of verbal communication emerging organically within a community whenever an event – in this case, Humphrey's rejection of Dixie at the altar – remains unexplained or unclear. In fact, the 'speculative wisdom' rumour emerges as a collective effort at provisional

[82] Stannard, 'The Crooked Ghost', p. 1354.

meaning-making and disappears once the ambiguous situation it seeks to interpret has been resolved.

The much-maligned Dougal is an Edinburgh graduate who moves to Peckham and takes up a personnel job at the textiles manufacturer Meadows, Meade & Grindley. As an outsider to the community, Dougal is generally regarded with suspicion, which helps to fuel the spread of further 'speculative wisdom' rumours concerning his identity. This is aided by the fact that Dougal, much like the storyteller described by Benjamin, relishes the performative mimicry of a wide range of identities whenever they suit his purpose.[83] Since he often poses as demonic and succeeds at turning upside down the social relationships between Peckham residents, the most unimaginative characters such as Mr. Weedin, the Personnel Manager, maintain that he is in fact 'a diabolical agent, if not in fact the Devil' (*BPR*, 77), a ubiquitous character in Scottish literature.[84] Other characters such as Mr. Druce, Dougal's boss, and Trevor Lomas, a young electrician and gang leader, believe that Dougal must be a spy who, under the pretence of investigating the 'inner lives' of his co-workers as part of his personnel role, is informing the police on their movements. Both rumours appear to be supported by fabricated evidence. Dougal tells Humphrey that the 'little bumps' in his head are the remains of his two horns, which have been removed by a plastic surgeon (*BPR*, 72). In a variation of this story, Dougal draws on the long-standing tradition of representing the Devil as a goat to further reinforce his satanic role, informing Nelly Mahone, Peckham's religious tramp, that he 'had a pair of horns like a goat when [he] was born [and] lost them in a fight at a later date' (*BPR*, 110).

Moreover, Trevor suspects that Dougal's writing of "Phrases suitable for Cheese", intended for the ghost-written autobiography of the retired actress and singer Maria Cheeseman, are actually secret communications that necessitate decryption: '"It's a code. Autumn means something else. Everything means something"' (*BPR*, 87). Trevor's conjecture reeks of paranoia regarding Dougal's presumed political power, which emanates from a rumour Dougal himself had asked Nelly to disseminate: 'Tell them I'm paid by the police to investigate certain irregularities in the industrial life of Peckham in the first place. See Nelly? I mean crime at the top in the wee factories' (*BPR*, 110). However, Trevor's inability to interpret Dougal's notes –

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[83] In conversation with other characters, Dougal relishes adopting the social role that best befits his situation. For example, at his second interview with Mr. Druce, Dougal 'changed his shape and became a professor' and subsequently 'leaned forward and became a television interviewer (*BPR*, 10), and when providing personal counsel to Mr. Druce, Dougal 'tightened his lips prudishly, and nodded, and he was a divorce judge suspending judgement till the whole story was heard out', later impersonating an 'analyst' (*BPR*, 60). However, Dougal is at the peak of his storytelling powers at a local dance, when he uses the lid of a dustbin to perform a variety of roles, from 'a Chinese coolie eating melancholy rice' to 'the man at the wheel of a racing car' (*BPR*, 55).

[84] See Gerard Carruthers, 'The Devil in Scotland', *The Bottle Imp*, 3 (2008) <https://www.thebottleimp.org.uk/2008/05/the-devil-in-scotland/> [accessed 4th March 2023].

partly resulting from his misguided assumption – echoes the challenges of interpretation that characterised much wartime intelligence work, particularly at Bletchley Park. Strengthened by Dougal's fabricated evidence, these rumours continue to spread organically throughout the community, as its members attempt to '*construct a meaningful interpretation*' of Dougal's mysterious behaviour and motives *'by pooling their intellectual resources*'.[85] However, far from acting as a mere catalyst for the creation of 'speculative wisdom' rumour, Dougal makes use of the 'institutional subversion' rumour to sabotage the written and unwritten norms of Peckham, triggering absenteeism, marriage disruption and personal tragedy among the members of the community.

According to Baker White, PWE rumours were at the service of an economic warfare strategy that sought to 'strangle the enemy economy' by leading enemy citizens 'to panic buying, or better still, to hoarding, and by creating mistrust in the substitute product' (*BL*, 84). For example, a rumour crafted during Spark's time in the organisation claimed that '[t]he fats and butter ration is to be halved in a fortnight' and '[t]he meat ration will be reduced to one quarter' (J/464), thus encouraging hoarding to sabotage the German food supplies.[86] Other PWE rumours from the same period were designed to damage the German currency and cause concern about the solvency of German banks, for instance, by suggesting that German companies were requesting payments in Swiss francs to be deposited in Swiss banks (J/463).[87] Furthermore, PWE rumours often attempted to break up German society by inspiring distrust of foreign workers, with a rumour blaming them for the burning of a large supply ship in the Duisburg port (J/467).[88]

In *The Ballad of Peckham Rye*, Dougal similarly takes upon himself the task of sabotaging the industrial psychology principles that have been implemented at Meadows, Meade & Grindley. His boss Mr. Druce praises Frederick W. Taylor's time and motion study (also known as scientific management) – the improvement of the worker's performance 'by analyzing the job into its various components and then determining the optimal, most efficient way to complete the job' – because it has increased production by a third.[89] As a result, the 'worker's movements are now designed to conserve energy and time in feeding the line' (*BPR*, 10). Mr. Druce's embrace of scientific management as a means of increasing production dehumanises his workers by restraining their physical movements and neglecting their emotional states; in contrast, the line becomes personified as a living being whose physiological needs must be prioritised at all times.

[85] Shibutani, p. 17.
[86] FO 898/69 Underground Propaganda Committee: Meetings, Minutes, and Reports, 1940-45. Allied Propaganda in World War II: The Complete Record of the Political Warfare Executive (FO 898). TNA, UK. *Archives Unbound*. We. 21 Feb. 2022.
[87] FO 898/69 Underground Propaganda Committee: Meetings, Minutes, and Reports, 1940-45.
[88] FO 898/69 Underground Propaganda Committee: Meetings, Minutes, and Reports, 1940-45.
[89] Andrew J. Vinchur, *The Early Years of Industrial and Organizational Psychology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), p. 39.

As H.C. Link points out in his study of employment psychology, scientific management was soon denounced as 'a cold-blooded and heartless method that treat[ed] human beings as just so many machines from which the last pound of energy is to be extracted', yet its influence would linger during the Second World War and beyond.[90] To combat the persistent objectification of his fellow workers, Dougal devotes his energies to researching 'their inner lives' with the intention of bringing to light their individuality, which Mr. Druce deliberately seeks to suppress, for example, through his efforts to eliminate absenteeism.

Absenteeism became a prominent concern during the Second World War because factory work was a vital component of the war effort. Despite the government's promotion of British stoicism – also known as 'the Blitz spirit' in the post-war period –, a 1942 Mass Observation report reveals that there were many divisions within industry, with 'widespread resentment of both management and government, widespread absenteeism and work-dissatisfaction, widespread fear of displacement by women and unskilled workers, and widespread anger among managers about the perceived breakdown of industrial discipline that had been brought about by war'.[91] Such an atmosphere of distrust was the perfect breeding ground for the spread of rumour. The prospect of workers' engagement in malingering tactics, for example, preoccupied both the Allied and Axis powers. While Britain aimed to minimise absenteeism at home, the PWE regularly encouraged absenteeism in Germany with the aim of hampering the enemy's war effort (see discussion of malingering booklet in Chapter 4).

In *The Ballad of Peckham Rye*, Dougal similarly encourages malingering. Convinced that the objectified workers 'must be bored with their jobs', he continuously spreads 'institutional subversion' rumours encouraging absenteeism from the workplace (*BPR*, 11). When Dixie complains bitterly about her boss Miss Coverdale, who is having an affair with Mr. Druce, Dougal promptly advises her to '[t]ake Monday off [and] [t]ake Tuesday off as well. Have a holiday' (*BPR*, 29). In fact, Dougal spurs workers to 'take every second Monday morning off their work' (*BPR*, 83). In doing so, he succeeds in disrupting Mr. Druce's scientific management and its resulting productive efficiency, which is most evidently embodied in the figures of Humphrey and Dixie. Humphrey believes that '[a]bsenteeism is downright immoral' and workers should '[g]ive a fair week's work for a fair week's pay' while Dixie's materialistic ambitions lead her to get an additional evening job so that she can afford 'a big splash wedding' and non-essential items

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[90] H. C. Link, *Employment Psychology: The Application of Scientific Methods to the Selection, Training, and Grading of Employees* (New York, NY: Macmillan, 1919), p. 376.
[91] Jose Harris, 'War and Social History: Britain and the Home Front during the Second World War', *Contemporary European History*, 1 (1992), 17-35 (p. 29). The myth of the Blitz spirit was further perpetuated by post-war historians – see Angus Calder, *The People's War: Britain 1939-45* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1969) and *Arthur Marwick, The Home Front: The British and the Second World War* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1976).

such as a spin-dryer (*BPR*, 29, 121, 51). Collectively, they are unwitting participants in the 'patriotism of productivity' that characterised post-war Britain.[92] As Michael Gardiner notes, Dougal's unsettling influence on Peckham's industrial life constitutes a critique of the post-war embracement of productive efficiency, which can be traced back to the Enlightenment view of 'rationalisation of production in commercial society as a general civilizational good'.[93] However, I suggest that Dougal's obsession with persuading his fellow workers to take time off can also be more concretely contextualised as an echo of the PWE's use of rumourmongering for waging economic warfare.

Yet Dougal's institutional sabotage extends beyond the confines of the factory. By reinforcing Humphrey's own suspicion that Dixie's obsession with saving and refusal to take time off is undesirable, Dougal contributes to hindering Humphrey and Dixie's marriage plans: '"I wouldn't marry her," Dougal said, "if you paid me"' (*BPR*, 108). Dixie's avarice results from what Nikolas Rose terms 'productive subjectivity', which regards 'personal time as productive time' and turns the economic consumption of bodies into a public good.[94] By rejecting Dixie at the altar, Humphrey is also rejecting the economic subjugation that she represents. Humphrey responds positively to Dougal's 'institutional subversion' rumour, proving able to swim against the current of expected behaviour by rejecting Dixie at the altar. However, after hearing that '[t]he girl is heart-broken', finally being able to express her individual emotional states, Humphrey eventually marries her (*BPR*, 140). Dougal's subversive influence does not immediately vanish, for Peckham emerges as a community that is no longer defined by its industry. Driving off with Dixie, Humphrey notices 'the children playing […] and the women coming home from work' in Peckham Rye, a park which looks 'like a cloud of green and gold, the people seeming to ride upon it, as you might say there was another world than this' (*BPR*, 140).

Unlike Humphrey, the characters who remain unreceptive to Dougal's practical 'wisdom' end up mentally unwell or even dead. The narrow-minded Mr. Weedin, for example, does not feel able to leave Meadows, Meade & Grindley, even though he is clearly unhappy in the company: 'If I had to leave here, Mr. Douglas, I would have to take a subordinate post elsewhere. I have my wife and family to think of' (*BPR*, 69). Dougal's recommendation that Merle should '[g]et another job […] and refuse to see [Mr. Druce] any more' also falls into deaf ears, as she persistently clings to her miserable circumstances: 'After being head of the pool […] I couldn't. I've got to think of my pride. And there's the upkeep of my flat. Mr. Druce puts a bit towards it' (*BPR*, 94). Mr. Druce, who similarly feels unable to leave his wealthy wife, is evidently jealous of Merle's

[92] Michael Gardiner, 'Spark versus *Homo Economicus*', *Textual Practice*, 32 (2018), 1513-28 (p. 1520).
[93] Gardiner, p. 1516.
[94] Gardiner, p. 1514.

relationship with Dougal and fearful that she might be passing confidential information on to him. In a thoroughly mechanical and unsentimental passage, Mr. Druce ends up callously murdering Merle by stabbing a corkscrew 'into her long neck nine times […] Then he took his hat and went home to his wife' (*BPR*, 133).[95]

Throughout these exchanges, Spark foregrounds the fact that the Peckham residents are living according to the Sartrean notion of 'bad faith', ignoring their own desires in order to fulfil societal expectations.[96] In this context, Dougal's spreading of 'institutional subversion' rumours contributes to his presentation as 'a diabolic version of existentialism', being 'able to remake his identity moment by moment and free at any time to choose a different future for himself'.[97] As storyteller and existentialist, Dougal rejects the power of habit and convention, instead encouraging his neighbours to free themselves from socio-economic strictures that seek to objectify them in order to become fully fledged individuals. The tragic ends of those who insist on living in 'bath faith' – Mr. Weedin, who has a breakdown, and Merle, who is murdered by Mr. Druce – expose the potentially dangerous consequences of living according to institutional expectations.

However, Dougal is not a fully benign presence in Peckham. In fact, he could also be seen as an acidly destructive force: an ambivalent parody of the 'elect' figure who seeks to mischievously undermine the Calvinist mentality and work ethic of the Peckham inhabitants.[98] Yet, whether for good or for evil, Dougal's rumourmongering appears to bring a sense of 'vision' to the Peckham inhabitants insofar as it shakes them out of their routine behaviour and encourages them to consider more reflective ways of living. Those characters who embrace Dougal's advice seem to eventually benefit from it while those who choose to neglect it eventually pay a heavy price. Significantly, Spark believes that Dougal has 'a moral sense' even though he doesn't 'necessarily do anything about it'.[99] In fact, Dougal recurrently adapts his behaviour as required for the subversion of conventional morality; in Colin McIlroy's words, 'faced with an immoral stance he suggests a moral action, and vice versa', thus foregrounding the characters' failures of

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[95] According to James Bailey, 'Merle's final resemblance to another literary typist, depicted in 'The Fire Sermon' from T. S. Eliot's *The Waste Land* (1922), appears all too obvious to be unintentional.' See James Bailey, *Muriel Spark's Early Fiction: Literary Subversion and Experiments with Form* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2021), pp. 114-5.
[96] Bad faith 'operates when a person, instead of facing up to his inevitable "ambiguity", resolves it by ignoring or denying some of the poles between which his existence stands.' See David E. Cooper, *Existentialism: A Reconstruction*, 2nd edn (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1999), p. 119. Jean Paul Sartre originally developed this concept in *Being and Nothingness: An Essay on Phenomenological Ontology* (London: Routledge, 2003).
[97] Craig, p. 112.
[98] See Gerard Carruthers, 'The Devil in Scotland', *The Bottle Imp*, 3 (2008) <https://www.thebottleimp.org.uk/2008/05/the-devil-in-scotland/> [accessed 4th March 2023].
[99] Muriel Spark's radio interview with S.M. Craig, quoted in Stannard, 'The Crooked Ghost', p. 1531.

perception. Just as Dougal draws attention to the baby-less pram 'stuck out on a balcony which hasn't any railings' – a pram that Merle had not noticed in her twelve and a half years living in the area –, he inspires those he encounters to reconnect with their environment and enlarge their horizons, even if his methods might appear bewildering to the conventionally-minded Peckham community. In pointing them towards hidden truths, Dougal is not just 'an image of the artist', but also an image of the propagandist who seeks to modify the mental outlook of the residents of Peckham with a view to prompting future action.

However, for all his research on the 'inner lives' of the inhabitants of Peckham, Dougal does not possess deep psychological understanding of his subjects, instead opportunistically mimicking whatever behaviour befits his situation. In the words of the anthropologist Clifford Geertz, Dougal prioritises 'thin' (explicative) rather than 'thick' (interpretative) description.[100] This approach contrasts with that of PWE propagandists, who as we have seen, took pains to understand the German mind and its likely responses to specific propaganda themes (see Chapter 2). Dougal's 'thin' mimicry, however, reveals a shared preoccupation with maintaining a semblance of plausibility – the appearance of truth rather than truth itself – which, as outlined in Chapter 1, strongly informs PWE work. In the last section of this chapter, I consider how such public images can be destroyed through what I call the 'reputation assassination' rumour.

5. 'Bang Bang You're Dead': The Reputation Assassination Rumour in *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie* and *A Far Cry from Kensington*

In his influential study 'Gossip and Scandal', the anthropologist Max Gluckman explains how gossip and scandal act as mechanisms of social control within a group of people united for a common cause. According to Gluckman, '[g]ossip […] is one of the chief weapons which those who consider themselves higher in status use to put those whom they consider lower in their proper place'.[101] While 'control disputation' is allowed within the boundary of the group, anyone who 'oversteps the values of the group' becomes 'unworthy of the larger group' and risks immediate exclusion.[102] Consequently, rumour can both consolidate and/or destroy authority, thereby signalling or reinforcing belonging or exclusion from the social group. The PWE was well-aware of this dimension of rumour, which was strategically deployed to undermine the enemy.

In his lecture on rumours, Baker White recommends that prospective rumour writers '[l]ook out for, and collect the names of unpopular officers, especially those in position of

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[100] See Clifford Geerze, 'Thick Description: Toward an Interpretive Theory of Culture', in *The Interpretation of Cultures* (New York: Basic Books, 1973), pp. 310-23.
[101] Gluckman, p. 309.
[102] Gluckman, p. 313.

command and remember human nature being what it is, that the private soldier loves a bit of salacious scandal about unpopular officers'.[103] Such rumours are more likely to succeed if they have 'a substratum of truth' or 'an emotional basis in fact, i.e. [they] fit with the sort of thing which people believe likely or want to happen' – what I've previously referred to as 'biased assimilation'.[104] For example, Baker White claims that the PWE 'succeeded in discrediting a Group Commander of the Luftwaffe during the Battle of Britain by putting out persistent rumours that he was afraid to go up in an aeroplane', a story that 'had a substratum of truth'.[105] Spark was equally fascinated by the power of rumour as a mechanism of social control and adopts the 'reputation assassination' rumour in her fiction to revoke power from those who intend to advance unethical or narcissistic activities threatening to pose harm to the fabric of society.

James Smith and Adam Piette have offered insightful analyses of how the 'reputation assassination' rumour operates in *Memento Mori* and *The Only Problem*, respectively. Smith suggests that Granny Barnacle's rumour claiming that Sister Burnstead is trying to euthanise the elderly, which leads to Sister Burnstead's removal from the care home and Granny Barnacle's death due to high blood pressure caused by excessive excitement, resonates with the PWE's spread of 'sibs' that sought to foster health scares such as the threat of 'forced euthanasia'.[106] Granny Barnacle deliberately crafts her rumour with the aim of damaging the reputation of Sister Burnstead so as to guarantee her immediate dismissal from the care home; ironically, however, the rumour accidentally harms the rumourmonger herself, gesturing to the fact that PWE rumours could be liable to a 'boomerang effect', returning to Britain and inadvertently deceiving their own side. Moreover, Smith argues that the insidious telephone calls that pester the elderly with reminders of death 'present a study of how people respond to psychological warfare campaigns', with the anonymous message becoming 'a cypher for each individual's beliefs, fears and desires'.[107] Much like the mysterious telephone caller, the PWE also relied on confirmation bias – the tendency to be more receptive to a rumour when it confirms, rather than disproves, one's existing beliefs – as a means of manipulating the German mind. Smith thus usefully traces Spark's interest in psychological warfare, and particularly rumour, to an early novel that has not previously been read through a historical or political lens.

Whereas Smith focuses on the word-of-mouth rumour, Piette considers how media channels create 'reputation assassination' rumours with the aim of sensationalising their stories

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[103] FO 898/554, 'Sibs: What they are and How they Work', European Intelligence Surveys and Reports.
[104] HS 1/332, P.W: Propaganda Policy and Administration; AD/O; Whispers and Rumours; India General; Propaganda Burma; American Plans.
[105] FO 898/554, 'Sibs: What they are and How they Work', European Intelligence Surveys and Reports.
[106] Smith, 'Covert Legacies in Postwar British Fiction', p. 346.
[107] Smith, 'Covert Legacies in Postwar British Fiction', p. 347.

and polarising public opinion. In his examination of *The Only Problem*, Piette suggests that the reputation of theological scholar Harvey Gotham is destroyed by 'the press's own fake news rumourmongering presentation of him as evil genius' who is believed to be financing his wife's terrorist activities, intended to liberate Europe from the evils of capitalism.[108] Piette thus establishes a crucial connection between Spark's interest in rumourmongering and contemporary media-spread disinformation or 'fake news' in a novel that, on the surface, appears to concern primarily the Biblical Book of Job. In this section, I build on the work of Smith and Piette to show two more instances of the 'reputation assassination' rumour in *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie* and *A Far Cry from Kensington*. I argue that Spark targets her 'reputation assassination' rumours at Miss Brodie and Hector Bartlett because they thrive on the instrumentalisation of others for unethical or narcissistic purposes. In doing so, I suggest that Spark seeks to cause their expulsion from their respective communities in order to bring their harmful influence to an end.

At Marcia Blaine School for Girls, Miss Brodie is 'held in great suspicion' by her fellow teachers (*PMJB*, 2). With the exception of the music master Gordon Lowther and the art master Teddy Lloyd, who are believed to be in love with the teacher, 'Miss Brodie's colleagues in the Junior School had been gradually turning against her' even before her prime began (*PMJB*, 45). Miss Brodie's chosen girls – the Brodie set – are known for 'being vastly informed on a lot of subjects irrelevant to the authorised curriculum […] and useless to the school as a school' (*PMJB*, 1). The headmistress Miss Mackay believes that Miss Brodie's educational methods are therefore unsuitable for the school and regularly leads new plots intended to force her resignation. These, Miss Brodie vigorously resists, aided and abetted by the Brodie set. Miss Mackay and Miss Brodie disagree at root on the purpose of education, 'whether [they] are employed to educate the minds of girls or to intrude upon them' (*PMJB*, 35). While Miss Brodie believes that she is doing the former, her overbearing control over the girls, which extends even to how many inches a window should be open, suggests otherwise. Given Miss Brodie's refusal to willingly resign from her teaching post, Miss Mackay relies on the 'reputation assassination' rumour to force her expulsion from the school. Doing so on educational grounds, however, proves extremely difficult because, notwithstanding Miss Brodie's idiosyncratic pedagogy and the evident educational shortcomings of her student Mary Macgregor, the Brodie girls are generally 'among the brightest […] in the school' (*PMJB*, 117). However, Miss Mackay keeps

> pumping the Brodie set. She knew it was useless to do so directly, her approach was indirect, in the hope that they would be tricked into letting fall some piece of evidence which could be used to enforce Miss Brodie's retirement (*PMJB*, 115).

One such piece of evidence comes unexpectedly from Miss Brodie's substitute teacher, Miss Gaunt, who attempts to incriminate Miss Brodie on the grounds of inappropriate sexual

[108] Piette, 'Muriel Spark and Fake News', p. 1584.

conduct with Mr. Lowther. Miss Gaunt brings sewing teacher Miss Ellen Kerr 'to testify to having found Miss Brodie's nightdress under a pillow of the double bed on which Mr. Lowther took his sleep' at a time when Miss Brodie spends much of her time attending to Mr Lowther's needs in his Cramond home (*PMJB*, 93). To Miss Mackay's disappointment, she is unable to use this evidence because the sewing teacher supplied no proof that the nightdress in fact belonged to Miss Brodie. Nevertheless, the teachers are psychologically inclined to accept the rumour concerning Miss Brodie's sexual scandal because it fits with their presumption of Miss Brodie's carnality, which is fuelled by her spinsterhood. In the meantime, Miss Brodie had put 'what energy she had to spare […] into political ideas' (*PMJB*, 114). Unbeknownst to her own Brodie set and Miss Mackay, Miss Brodie 'made [her student Emily Joyce] see sense' and sent her to fight for Franco in the Spanish Civil War (*PMJB*, 124). On discovering that Miss Brodie has been promoting fascism, Sandy passes the intelligence on to Miss Mackay, who promises to 'question her pupils on those lines and see what emerges', a strategy which eventually succeeds in pushing the rogue teacher into retirement (*PMJB*, 125). So, in the end, Miss Brodie's teaching career is not finished by a 'reputation assassination' rumour – even though Sandy's report evidently justifies Miss Mackay's existing desire to dismiss Miss Brodie – but by the disclosure of verifiable information – confirmed by personal testimonies. Spark's foregrounding of Miss Mackay's evidence sharply contrasts with Miss Brodie's method of 'making patterns with facts' and clearly indicates her commitment to democratic values (*PMJB*, 71).

A later victim in Spark's deployment of the 'reputation assassination' rumour is Hector Bartlett in *A Far Cry from Kensington*. The editor Mrs. Hawkins repeatedly labels mediocre would-be writer Hector as a *pisseur de copie* because he 'pisses hack journalism [and] urinates frightful prose' (*FCK*, 101). According to the famous novelist and Hector's mentor Emma Loy, such an 'epithet' seems to be 'going the rounds and […] ruining Hector's career' (*FCK*, 101). Not only is Hector presented as a dreadful writer, but most alarmingly, Mrs. Hawkins also believes that he 'was always trying to use [her], or further some scheme of his through [her] presumed influence with Martin York' (*FCK*, 42). By insisting on calling Hector a *pisseur de copie*, Mrs. Hawkins loses two publishing jobs, yet her personal integrity remains intact. Hector would later become 'too embarrassing for [Emma Loy] to carry her world-wide reputation' and she would try to detach herself from him, but not without having 'to pay for it' with Hector's subsequent venomous writing about her (*FCK*, 43). In the meantime, however, Emma Loy claims that 'Hector has been taking the most absurd steps' – presumably his recruitment of the Polish dressmaker Wanda as a Black Box operator against Mrs. Hawkins – 'to stop [Mrs. Hawkins] calling him that name and to win [her] approval', a fact disregarded by the editor, who prizes creative diligence over public reputation (*FCK*, 130).

Unbeknownst to Mrs. Hawkins, Hector is carrying out a 'reputation assassination' campaign of his own by posting to Wanda fake newspaper cuttings that accuse her of evading taxes with the aim of coercing the dressmaker into continuing to operate the Black Box against Mrs. Hawkins (see Chapter 4). In doing so, Hector exploits Wanda's precarious position as a social outsider, who, much as Jean Brodie and Sandy Stranger, has been separated from her group – the Polish Catholics in post-war London – and her terror of the state as a refugee who has been rendered stateless in fleeing from the Nazi Germany and Soviet Union occupation of her home country (see Chapter 2). As we have seen, the PWE similarly preyed on citizens' vulnerability and lack of knowledge – see, for example, the aforementioned presentation of foreign workers as a threat to the German war effort – as part of the arguable state of exception brought about by warfare. However, in regulating the boundaries of the social group, rumours can also promote an innate sense of social justice that reinforces the group's existing values. For example, PWE rumours suggesting that the German High Command had access to wider benefits than the civil population at large, worked to reinforce citizens' dislike of cheaters, thus consolidating a divide between the leaders and the led that benefited the British cause.

What Miss Brodie and Hector Barlett have in common – and I would argue, the reason why they appear to be the targets of Spark's 'reputation assassination' rumours – is the fact that they thrive on the instrumentalisation of others for their own unethical or narcissistic ends. In this context, Sandy and Mrs. Hawkins use the 'reputation assassination' rumour to liberate their institutions – be it a school or a writing community – from the harmful influence of Miss Brodie and Hector Bartlett, respectively. Far from being concerned about 'the state of world affairs', as Miss Mackay believes is the case, Sandy is primarily interested in 'putting a stop to Miss Brodie' for ethical reasons (*PMJB*, 125). Mrs. Hawkins similarly deploys the 'reputation assassination' rumour to destroy Hector's authority within the writing community, and in doing so, warns Emma Loy about his undesirableness to her career, thus preserving the integrity of the publishing industry and writerly community as guarantors of creative excellence.

Conclusion

Given Spark's interest in representing enclosed communities, her novels are primarily concerned with how rumours are crafted and how characters respond to them, rather than with their chain of transmission onwards. Spark's fiction shows an awareness that rumours often grow organically as part of the human drive to create stories that can explain the world around us, whether these are provisional, as in the 'speculative wisdom' rumours in *Not to Disturb*, or long-lasting, as in the 'folk wisdom' rumours in *Loitering with Intent* and *A Far Cry from Kensington*. In this chapter, I have suggested that Spark's fiction poses a challenge to Benjamin's assertion that 'the decline of storytelling is the rise of the novel', using rumour to demonstrate the didactic potential of the genre. However, Spark learnt through her involvement in black propaganda at the PWE that rumour is often far from disinterested. In fact, Spark's fiction is attuned to the fact that institutions and individuals often create and spread rumours deliberately with the aim of influencing or manipulating public opinion for their own gain. I have argued that Spark's adoption of the 'institutional subversion' rumour in *The Ballad of Peckham Rye* and the 'reputation assassination' rumour in *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie* and *A Far Cry from Kensington* strongly resonates with aspects of the rumour strategy set out by the PWE and the SOE, as archival documents demonstrate.

Nevertheless, I suggest that the didactic potential of rumour as a strategy of collective problem-solving and counselling – often seen as characteristic of oral forms of literature – remains central to rumour as a weapon for deception. As Shibutani notes, planted rumours 'are not accepted unless they reflect the developing mood', hence the significance of 'giv[ing] fitting expression to what is already "in the air"'.[109] Whilst tapping into citizens' existing beliefs and expectations, rumours also contain grains of truth, which have potential for countering institutional narratives and creating alternative perspectives, particularly in tightly controlled environments. Once rumours are planted in a population group, however, the propagandist has little means of controlling them, so planted rumours can only survive if they are taken up and elaborated by citizens in their quest for social and political truths. As such, rumourmongering might be seen as 'an indication of independent judgement and of the unwillingness of men to accept passively formally approved definitions'.[110] This is certainly the case with Dougal Douglas, whose 'institutional subversion' rumours shake the inhabitants of Peckham out of their routine behaviour and allow them to develop a more perceptive sense of 'vision'. Similarly, Sandy and Mrs. Hawkins' uses of the 'reputation assassination' rumour serve the purpose of stopping the unethical manipulation of the Brodie set and asserting the value of creative integrity when under threat, respectively. Spark paradoxically views rumour as carrying potential as an affirmative way of pursuing truths, though she also acknowledges that they require careful verification, especially when emerging from interested parties, such as Lou in Spark's children short story 'The French Window'. By exposing the use of rumour as a weapon for institutional subversion and reputation assassination, Spark, I suggest, seeks to promote the means to freedom and diversity of thought, and, therefore, to social justice in tightly controlled environments.

[109] Shibutani, pp. 196-7.
[110] Shibutani, p. 212.

Conclusion: Muriel Spark in the Age of Fake News

This thesis has argued that Spark's fiction might be read as an extended attempt to atone for her PWE employment by revealing the methods of propaganda and urging readers to exercise critical thought to avoid falling prey to manipulation. It has demonstrated that Spark's employment at the PWE substantially influenced the style, sources, and themes of her literary work, as well as sharpened her awareness of the complex relationship between art and propaganda. Art inspires us to consider alternative viewpoints whereas propaganda persuades us to accept narrow perspectives. Moreover, artists usually remain accountable for their creations whereas propagandists intend to remain invisible, thus exhibiting lack of transparency concerning the origins of their biased information. Spark shows a unique understanding of the kinship between art and propaganda, which rests on the human capacity for imagining alternative realities that enables us both to devise fictions and to engage in deception.

Since writers have the capacity to understand the psychology of the reader and fabricate stories capable of stimulating existing thoughts and provoking responses, it is unsurprising that 'an unprecedented number of authors were recruited into the realm of the British information agencies, whether for projects at the Ministry of Information (MOI), as employees of intelligence services or as workers in black propaganda organs'.[1] Following her PWE employment, Spark was fascinated by the extent to which the intelligence gathering underpinning black propaganda was able to reveal the psychology of the enemy, which could then be targeted with fabricated stories that incorporated such intelligence. Nevertheless, she understood that, whereas propaganda purports to determine the psychology of its target audience, fiction acknowledges the impossibility of ever apprehending with certainty the sources of our belief systems, or at any rate, apprehending such sources from a perspective that does not reflect our own prejudices. In Chapter 2, I have suggested that Spark and Murdoch's awareness of this dimension of fiction developed from their contact with foreign nationals, whose motivations often resisted understanding. In fact, Spark's novels often foreground the characters' inability to decode each other's intentions – see, for example, Paul's struggle to read Elsa's thought processes when she looks out of the window towards the East River – and in doing so, present fiction as a powerful form of counterpropaganda.

In Chapter 1, I have demonstrated how Spark exposes plausible narratives and myths as carefully crafted pieces of propaganda that allow Spark's 'mythologisers and fiction-makers on a grand scale' – Miss Brodie, Abbess Alexandra and Hubert Mallindaine – to attempt to bend reality

[1] James Smith, 'Covert Legacies in Postwar British Fiction', p. 338.

to their personal desires.[2] Much like the PWE, Spark's fiction strives to understand human psychology as a means to challenge and undermine entrenched beliefs. In particular, it engages questions concerning what motivates people to take unverified information at face value. How can German citizens, in the case of the PWE, and readers, in the case of Spark, be made to engage with facts and adjust their perspectives in the process? The PWE's determination to undermine Nazi ideology by fabricating '[d]etailed truth with believable lies', however, later elicited reflection on how politically expedient actions may be tainted by ethical misgivings (*CV*, 148). In Chapter 2, I have explored how Spark comes to terms with this dilemma through her fictional adoption of an ethics of deception and her advocacy of fiction as an antidote to the dangerous rise of disinformation that has arguably culminated in our own age of fake news. As a consequence of Spark's complicity in 'the dark field of Black Propaganda or Psychological Warfare', I have suggested that her fiction has acquired a reinvigorated pedagogical drive to help readers recognise and challenge propagandistic discourses that seek to restrict the expression of plural perspectives (*CV*, 147). As Chapters 3, 4, and 5 further testify, Spark's fiction repurposes sound technologies, forgeries, and rumours, reworking and laying them bare as important tools that have the capacity to disrupt the power of authority and forge new critical understandings.

Drawing on the relationship between the PWE and contemporary disinformation in the tradition of military counter-insurgency propaganda, this conclusion offers a somewhat more speculative exploration of the significance of PWE propaganda and Spark's fictional exposure of PWE propaganda methods in our age of fake news. It presents Spark as a still vitally relevant historical and political commentator, able to anticipate the threat that disinformation poses to democracy and offer valuable insights on how to resist dogmatic thinking and cultivate critical scepticism. However, Spark also understood that disinformation lures us precisely because it taps into the human need to confirm our existing beliefs. Indeed, Spark's satire on the lengths characters go to maintain self-deceptions is a vital source of comedy in her fiction. I suggest that Spark's intelligence work for the PWE not only educated her on how the persistent erosion of facts and media technologies contribute to the spread of disinformation, but most importantly, shaped her understanding of how techniques of psychological warfare developed in a military context could be dangerously redeployed to influence the political behaviour of civilians in the post-war period.

Following the Second World War, the processes of decolonization and the Holocaust, and reckoning with the threat of global nuclear warfare, the 1960s 'witnessed a major political, cultural, artistic, and intellectual upheaval, at the heart of which was nothing less than the nature

[2] Ian Rankin, 'The Deliberate Cunning of Muriel Spark', in *The Scottish Novel since the Seventies*, ed. by Stuart Wallace and Randall Stevenson (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1993), pp. 41-53 (p. 46).

of facts themselves'.[3] Postmodernism – an intellectual movement which had been partly founded on Nietzsche's critique of the correspondence of language to reality in 'On Truth and Falsity in their Ultramoral Sense' – suggested that facts do not simply reflect an immutable reality, but are culturally constructed.[4] Postmodernism was initially perceived as a liberating critical stance, particularly for female and colonial subjects who felt that the grand narratives of the Enlightenment had been deployed as the means to legitimate their exploitation. However, the postmodern theory of critics such as Jean-François Lyotard and Michel Foucault eventually engendered a dangerous relativism that contributed to eroding the boundary between analytic truth – sober, empirical and apolitical truth corroborated by evidence that has implications for the present and contributes to creating consensus within society – and ideological truth – emotional, value-ridden and political truth that speaks to past or future mythologies, confirms entrenched beliefs and creates divisions within society.[5] Although Spark has often been categorised as a postmodern writer, I suggest that her fiction retains a commitment to analytic truth, demonstrated by her desire to resurrect the author as a means to preserve accountability (see Chapter 4). On this matter, Spark, most likely influenced by her intelligence work, appeared to be swimming against the current of contemporary criticism. However, postmodernism was being used to legitimate the covert work of intelligence agencies, which were 'producing knowledge, *constructing* new artifacts, shaping discourse in order to serve their tactical or strategic purposes – changing the world as they went'.[6] Disinformation agents thus benefited from the erosion of analytic truth and the rise of ideological truth to produce fake news that appeal to us precisely because they tell us 'not what is necessarily true, but what we want to believe'.[7]

In 1990, Strategic Communication Laboratories (SCL) became 'the first private company to provide "psyops" to the military' with the aim of supporting the work of defence agencies in battling extremism and disinformation in countries such as the UK, the US, Norway and Saudi Arabia.[8] Alongside such defence work, however, SCL was also employed on political work

[3] Thomas Rid, *Active Measures: The Secret History of Disinformation and Political Warfare* (London: Profile Books, 2021), p. 427.
[4] See Friedrich Nietzsche, 'On Truth and Falsity in their Ultramoral Sense', in *The Complete Works of Friedrich Nietzsche*, *Volume II: Early Greek Philosophy and Other Essays*, ed. by Oscar Levy (New York: Macmillan, 1911), pp. 171-92.
[5] Rid, pp. 425-6. See Jean-François Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1984) and Michel Foucault, 'The Order of Discourse', in *Untying the Text: A Post-Structuralist Reader*, ed. by Robert Young (London: Routledge, 1981), pp. 51-78.
[6] Rid, p. 428.
[7] Jo Fox, '"Fake News"', p. 180.
[8] Jesse Witt and Alex Pasternack, 'Before Trump, Cambridge Analytica quietly built "psyops" for militaries', *Fast Company*, 25th September 2019 <https://www.fastcompany.com/90235437/before-trump-cambridge-analytica-parent-built-weapons-for-war> [accessed 2 March 2023].

seeking to 'enhance stability and disseminate propaganda'.[9] For this purpose, SCL developed 'Target Audience Analysis' (TAA), a 'scientific application, [that] involves a comprehensive study of audience groups and forms the basis for interventions aimed at reinforcing or changing attitudes and behavior'.[10] Essentially, SCL collected data created by people's interactions with social media without their consent and analysed it in order to understand how individuals and social groups are likely to respond to political advertising. Such data surveillance would later enable SCL's sibling company, Cambridge Analytica, to micro-target propaganda at civilian populations with the aim of disrupting democratic processes such as the 2016 US presidential election and the 2016 UK European Union membership referendum.[11] Even though SCL's operations ceased on 1st May 2018 following the Cambridge Analytical scandal, 'its personnel and data persist, and similar influence operations are thriving, powered by state-sponsored actors and an unregulated industry of influence peddlers'.[12] The use of data surveillance for propaganda is at the root of contemporary fake news. With the collapse of the Enlightenment idea of a rational future characterised by social and economic progress, fake news has been widely adopted by populist movements that make use of TAA to agglutinate disparate individuals under a shared identity, usually for a short period of time. Simultaneously, fake news has also become a weapon wielded by populist leaders such as Trump and populist television networks such as Fox News with a twofold aim: deterring the public from trusting media channels that are critical of conservative policies and presenting themselves as the gatekeepers of truth to cover up their widespread dissemination of false claims.[13] In fact, fake news ultimately seeks to 'corrode the foundations of liberal democracy' by impinging on 'our ability to assess facts on their merits and self-correct accordingly.' For example, despite not a single high court finding widespread proof of such action, 'an estimated 50 million Republicans still believe the false claim that the 2020 election was stolen from Donald Trump'.[14]

The collection of personal data for covert propaganda is of course not new, and the PWE was instrumental in developing the psychological warfare methods that would be passed down to the IRD, and eventually to private 'psyops' companies such as SCL and Cambridge Analytica.

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[9] Witt and Pasternack, 'Before Trump', *Fast Company*, 25th September 2019.
[10] Witt and Pasternack, 'Before Trump', *Fast Company*, 25th September 2019.
[11] Lee Grieveson, 'On Data, Media, and the Deconstruction of the Administrative State', *The Critical Quarterly*, 63 (2021), 101-19 (p. 101-2).
[12] Witt and Pasternack, 'Before Trump', *Fast Company*, 25th September 2019.
[13] Andrew S. Ross and Damian J. Rivers, 'Discursive Deflection: Accusation of "Fake News" and the Spread of Mis- and Disinformation in the Tweets of President Trump', *Social Media + Society* (April-June 2018), 1-12 (p. 2).
[14] Lois Beckett, 'Millions of Americans think the election was stolen. How worried should we be about more violence?', *The Guardian*, 16th April 2021 <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2021/apr/16/americans-republicans-stolen-election-violence-trump> [accessed 12th August 2022].

While Spark believed that psychological warfare could be justified as a 'state of exception' in the war against fascism (see Chapter 2), she was evidently troubled by the continuation of such techniques in the post-war period. Through her fictional representation of plausible narratives and mythmaking, Spark offers a critique of the erosion of the facts which provide the foundations on which democratic debate is built. She satirises Abbess Alexandra, the nun-turned-propagandist for whom the truth no longer appears to matter as long as she can produce believable lies to reinvent reality according to her wishes. In her own words, 'to look for the truth [...] will be like looking for the lost limbs, toes and fingernails of a body blown to pieces in an air crash' (*AC*, 70). Instead, what matters is establishing what 'the story [is] according to us' (*AC*, 64). Spark's fiction firmly confronts such relativism and reminds us that facts do matter if we are to remain discerning citizens.

However, the 21st-century emergence of new social media technologies and internet culture has substantially altered the spread and reach of disinformation, and threatens to pose a global challenge to democracy. Despite opening a valuable information space where anyone can share information, the proliferation of mass-controlled social bots that simulate human users on social media has wiped out transparency, and therefore, accountability. For example, social bots currently comprise approximately 'between 9% and 15% of active Twitter accounts'.[15] Social media is also able to amplify the spread of information in such a way that fake news can quickly become 'viral' with dangerous consequences. For example, *Time* magazine reported that accidental poisonings with household disinfectants were up by 121% in the last eight days of April 2020, following Trump's reckless suggestion 'that injections of disinfectant could help defeat the coronavirus'.[16] Spark had perceptively anticipated the importance of media technologies for the pursuit of propaganda campaigns, as evidenced by Abbess Alexandra's attempts to create 'some sort of a garble' for the reporters in order to manipulate public opinion (*AC*, 70) and the 'viral' proliferation of fake news in traditional media that Adam Piette astutely identified in *The Only Problem*.[17] However, the advent of internet culture has radically changed the art of disinformation in the last decade. As Thomas Rid explains, by the mid-2010s, '[t]he old art of slow-moving, highly skilled, close-range, labor-intensive psychological influence [which, following Soviet terminology, he terms 'active measures'] had turned high tempo, low-skilled,

[15] Onur Varol, Emilio Ferrara, Clayton Davis, Filippo Menczer and Alessandro Flammini, 'Online Human-Bot Interactions: Detection, Estimation, and Characterization', *Proceedings of the International AAAI Conference on Web and Social Media*, 11 (2017), 280-289 (p. 280) <https://ojs.aaai.org/index.php/ICWSM/article/view/14871> [accessed 12th August 2022].
[16] Jeffrey Kluger, 'Accidental Poisonings Increased After President Trump's Disinfectant Comments', *Time*, 12th May 2020 <https://time.com/5835244/accidental-poisonings-trump/> [accessed 12th August 2022].
[17] See Piette, 'Muriel Spark and Fake News', pp. 1577-91.

remote, and disjointed', so active measures became 'more active than ever before but less measured'.[18]

The mass control of social bots by governments and private companies has undoubtedly enabled the manipulation of public opinion on a much larger scale, for example, by encouraging information cascades and group polarisation, which can successfully skew public opinion and prevent the development of a climate of debate. According to Cass R. Sunstein, a cascade 'occurs when a group of early movers say or do something and other people', particularly those that lack reliable information to form their own judgement, 'follow this signal'.[19] Group polarisation illustrates a similar phenomenon, 'the fact that when like-minded people get together, they often end up thinking a more extreme version of what they thought before they started to talk to one another'.[20] Unlike these processes, which promote predictable linear outcomes, fiction educates us on how non-linear thinking operates. By weaving her webs of 'lies', Spark demonstrates the potential for fiction to exercise our cognitive ability to negotiate and understand non-linear processes such as surprise, which acts as a limit to probabilistic thinking. Although her mythmakers evidently attempt to exploit the principles of plausibility (see Chapter 1), Spark's most subversive characters – including Dougal, Lise and Elsa, among many others – seek to sabotage social and cultural expectations, and therefore, open up a valuable space for expressions of dissent and democratic debate. By exploring unexpected points of convergence rather than conventional arguments that align with our pre-existing beliefs, Spark demonstrates that fiction shows potential to both combat the tribalism elicited by information cascades and group polarisation and broaden our critical horizons.

The populist rhetoric created by the 'Vote Leave' campaign ahead of the 2016 European Union membership referendum, which resulted in Britain's departure from the European Union, drew heavily on the data surveillance pioneered by SCL and later embraced by Cambridge Analytica. In conversation with the lead digital officer of the 'Vote Leave' campaign, Thomas Borwick, journalist Peter Pomerantsev learns that his role involved 'connect[ing] individual causes to his campaign, even if that connection might feel somewhat tenuous at first' and 'sending different targeted ads to various groups'.[21] Using the vague slogan 'Take Back Control', Borwick was able to instrumentalise a wide range of political causes such as animal rights or immigration in order to present the EU as 'the enemy conspiring to undermine whichever cause it was you

[18] Rid, p. 7.
[19] Cass R. Sunstein, *On Rumour: How Falsehoods Spread, Why We Believe Them, and What Can Be Done* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2014), p. 6.
[20] Sunstein, p. 6.
[21] Peter Pomerantsev, *This is Not Propaganda: Adventures in the War Against Reality* (London: Faber & Faber, 2020), p. 212-3.

cared for'.[22] During the Second World War, the PWE had similarly sought to understand what mattered to the Germans living under the Nazi regime in order to be able to collectively move them to distrust, and ultimately betray, their government. As part of this strategy, the PWE also pitted population groups against each other to cause discord and undermine National Socialism from within.

After her PWE work came to an end, Spark remained fascinated by the magnetism of populist movements such as fascism and invented Miss Brodie as a version of the populist leader in *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie*. Miss Brodie's set is described as 'having no team spirit and very little in common with each other outside their continuing friendship with Jean Brodie' (*PMJB*, 2). By flattering the girls individually for each of their unique talents, Miss Brodie's allure as a charismatic leader serves to agglutinate the girls into a diverse but unified group identity – inseparable from herself – that she can mobilise to further her own personal ends. In fact, Sandy metaphorically perceives the Brodie set as

> a body with Miss Brodie for the head. She perceived herself, the absent Jenny, the ever-blamed Mary, Rose, Eunice and Monica, all in a frightening little moment, in unified compliance to the destiny of Miss Brodie, as if God had willed them to birth for that purpose (*PMJB*, 28).

Miss Brodie's manipulation of her girls to achieve her own ends in fact foreshadows Trump's stirring of tens of thousands of his supporters to undermine legitimate political processes, as demonstrated by their storming of the Capitol in response to Trump's unfounded claim that the 2020 US election had been stolen from him.[23]

As this conclusion has suggested, the psychological warfare work that the PWE carried out during the Second Word War can be seen as a forerunner of the political propaganda carried out by private companies such as SLC and Cambridge Analytica in the late 20th and early 21st centuries. Following her PWE experience, Spark became a successful novelist, and her fiction signals her perceptive anticipation of how strategies of psychological warfare could be adopted to disrupt democratic processes in the post-war period. In novels such as *The Abbess of Crewe* and *The Only Problem*, Spark had already investigated the potential of traditional media to reshape reality. With the advent of social media and internet culture, however, it became evident that 'bots, trolls and cyborgs' do not simply show as much potential to reshape reality, but most disturbingly, are able to replicate 'a climate of opinion' that is already altering people's views on a range of social, economic, and cultural matters. In short, consensus – the collective decision-making at the root of democracy – is currently being manufactured with a view to promoting

[22] Pomerantsev, p. 213.
[23] Kimberly Dozier and Vera Bergengruen, 'Incited by the President, Pro-Trump Rioters Violently Storm the Capitol', *Time*, 6th January 2021 <https://time.com/5926883/trump-supporters-storm-capitol/> [accessed 13th August 2022].

specific views and behaviours and restricting the expression of critical opinions. In particular, the persistent denunciation of reputable media channels as purveyors of fake news threatens to erase the legitimacy of journalism as a trusted means to acquire fact-checked information that can help us form opinions and pass judgements. In this context, Spark's fiction becomes more relevant than ever, as it instructs readers on how to identify the methods by which propaganda attempts to buy our assent and develop critical thinking skills that enable expressions of dissent. Whilst acknowledging that no one is entirely immune to the charms of political propaganda, which nowadays often draws on personal data to attempt to shape our behaviour, Spark positions fiction's unpredictability as an instructive means to evade the propaganda surveillance that surrounds us on all sides. In T.S. Eliot's words, culture, unlike propaganda, 'can never be wholly conscious'.[24]

[24] T. S. Eliot, *Notes towards the Definition of Culture* (London: Faber and Faber, 1973), p. 94.

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