

Article

# Implementation of Critical Realism in Muriel Spark's Novels

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**Abstract:** This study analyzes Muriel Spark's novels from the point of view of critical realism, how physicality, narrative style, character traits relate to social injustices, and personal struggles. The main element of critical realism in Spark's creativity is described in the depiction of social reality, everyday life. Spark's works often depict production, human behavior, the complexity of society's demands, burden, how female characters behave in a certain process, through which the author's relationship comes. Muriel Spark's novels such as "The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie", "Aiding and Abetting" and "The Comforters" are considered to be the original examples of critical realism. In "The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie", Spark criticizes the controlling nature of the main character, Miss Brodie, and her influence on her students, which reflects the social situations existed in society and mainly in educational institutions. "Aiding and Abetting" provides inter-textual connections, depicting a real-life crime in the context of guilt and salvation, to illustrate the psychological conflicts faced by its characters. In the novel "The Comforters", Spark illuminates the social movements of the stories, using a meta-fictional approach to the goal of combining reality into the author's imagination. This study aims to discuss the analysis of literary critics, the writer's style of storytelling, the formation of characters, particularly women in society with many social problems. Using critical realism in Spark's works, she invites readers to think individually about the social experiences that shape life and society's norms. By criticizing gender stereotypes in relation to the clash of female characters, she puts the themes of rebellion and struggle at the heart of the struggle for self-awareness into a wide public discussion. Thus Muriel Spark's contribution to critical realism in literature recognizes its literary importance, analyzes the social, qualitative, and qualitative effects of non-traditional storytelling techniques capable of creating complex imagery.

**Keywords:** Muriel Spark, Critical Realism, Narrative Style, Social Injustices, Personal Struggles, Psychological Complexities, Metafiction, Gender Stereotypes

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## 1. Introduction

Muriel Spark is renowned for her unique narrative style that blends critical realism with psychological insight[1]. Her novels often explore the intricacies of human behavior and societal expectations, particularly focusing on the lives of women. Critical realism, a literary approach that highlights the social and material conditions affecting individuals[2], serves as a powerful tool in Spark's storytelling. The founder of this approach is Roy Bhaskar describes it as a philosophy of science combining with critical naturalism [3]. According to him the world that surrounds us is differentiated and structured. So, our understanding of it based on theoretical and empirical observation. This article aims to analyze how Spark employs critical realism to portray the psychological and social dimensions of her characters, thereby offering a critique of societal norms and stereotypes .

## 2. Materials and Methods

Mainly, the study adopts a qualitative approach, analyzing primary texts by Muriel Spark, including "The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie", "Aiding and Abetting", and "The Comforters". Secondary sources, including literary critiques and scholarly articles, are also reviewed to provide context and support the analysis.

Following methods and approaches have been implemented to reveal elements of critical realism in Spark's novels:

A close reading method is employed to identify instances of critical realism, focusing on narrative techniques, character development, and thematic elements.

The comparative analysis is used to compare Spark's work with other modern and historical works, whether specific or general, of the view of critical realism. Spark's chosen themes, images, and narrative styles are explored in ways that match, contrast, and conflict with themes in other works to further our understanding of the writer's contribution to literary genres.

Discourse analysis implies translating and applying the basic meanings of the situation and events given in the text in the context of social reality. By analyzing the characters' monologues, dialogues, and narrative descriptions, we can determine how Spark reflects social and psychological structures through her "language." This method is particularly useful in understanding how characters express their personalities and interact with others in social settings.

The narrative focus of narratology is the study of the style in which the story is written and how it is understood by the reader. By analyzing the voice of the story, its structure, the author's point of view, we can realize that this method will help to reveal the truths such as the characters created by Spark, the inner world of the file, the originality, and we can have content. This method helps to assess how narrative methods fit into the themes of critical realism.

Character analysis is also a detailed character analysis that includes studying the motivations, actions, perspectives of the main characters in Spark's novels. This method reveals how characters shape socio-psychological forces aligning with the ability to control them, leading to the core values of the human psyche and the essence of individuality. By concentrating on the characters' inner worlds and their intrapersonal as well as interpersonal relationships, we can realize Spark's portrayal of the complex behavior of the human being[19].

Thematic analysis are based on findings and application of primary themes in Spark's novels such as identity, power, guilt, and morality. This method allows us to see how these themes are formed in different contexts, how they reflect social and psychological problems, mainly of women in the existing society. Thematic analysis helps to find out situations in Spark's writing and their connection to critical realism. Context analysis which has been implemented, examines the geographical, historical, socio-cultural, and biographical contexts in which Spark wrote her novels. By understanding the social and personal influences of Spark's writing style, we can figure out how her piece of writing reflect, observe and evaluate the world around her. This method allows to acquire further understanding of the external factors that influence the themes and characters in Spark's novels[20].

Intertextual analysis examines the relationship between Spark's texts and other literary works, identifying interactions with other authors[22], using various references. This method helps publicize the secret meanings of Spark's novels, and how they relate to the wider literary traditions. An intertextual analysis reveals Spark's works as part of an ongoing debate about critical realism and related themes[4].

Structural analysis focuses on the formal elements of Spark novels, such as plot structure, chapter organization, and narrative pacing. By observing how these elements are structured, we can understand how Spark's narrative strategies contribute to the overall effect of the works she wrote. Structural analysis helps to understand the relationship between form and content in Spark's study of critical realism[23].

### 3. Results

According to the results of the analysis, the factors indicating that Spark used critical realism, including social pressures in society, are manifested in the creation of images of a perfect woman who can control her personal desires and inclinations. In the work "Miss Jean Brody", she skillfully shows the connection between fantasy and reality, and the differences, conveys the goals of the narrator's thoughts to the reader in a meta-fictional way [2]. Directly in the novel, she sharply criticizes the activities of the leaders through the character of Miss Brody, who shows an unconventional method of control over her students[24].

In the short story "Aiding and Abetting" she uses the episode of a crime that happened in real life to reflect the mental problems that people have experienced, thereby analyzing topics such as feelings of guilt, hope for salvation, waiting, and support. In the process of writing this work, she uses a fragmented narrative structure that expresses multiple perspectives within an unsystematic chronology of time. The use of various narrations, quotations from works, points of view reflects the various aspects of truth, subjectivity, reality through postmodern ideas and strives to make the story more perfect [3].

In "The Comforters", Spark uses the meta-narrative method, which defines the nature of reality and the author's place in the work, thereby describing the social nature of the work [4]. The heroine of the novel, the writer Caroline Rose, becomes the protagonist who fights not only for her own life and dream goals, but also to eliminate the narrator's interference with her work. Such a meta-fictional turn suggests identity, the interrelationship between reality and fiction, and vice versa. Caroline's state of mind creates distractions, different directions, processes and directs the reader to individual thinking, predictions and solutions. Spark skillfully portrays Caroline's mindset as she struggles with her identity and external factors from different angles. This complex process between the image and the narrator serves as a metaphor for the social demands placed on women by society, and invites readers to reflect on the difficulties of asserting one's voice and identity, which the work repeatedly mentions[25].

### 4. Discussion

Muriel Spark's novels reflect the social and psychological struggles of human life through different concepts and directions. Manifestation of critical realism in her works encourages students to analyze their behavior and use the principles of acting in[27] accordance with social norms and requirements. Spark's focus on female protagonists allows her to critique not only gender stereotypes but also to consider the wider issues of conformity and rebellion. Her portrayal of women navigating societal pressures and personal dilemmas highlights the constraints imposed by social norms and explores the struggles for autonomy and self-realization[9].

British author and literary critic David Lodge in his book "Fiction" discusses Spark's narrative techniques, the use of unreliable narrators and exploration of the relationship between magic and reality in novels such as "Comforters"[5].

A. S. Byatt, a well-known British writer and critic, speaking about Spark's storytelling style, noted the effective use of metafiction, which was clearly reflected in the novel "The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie", and the playfulness of language in the story structure [6].

Norman Page, Nottingham University Professor of Modern English Literature, says:- "She does not belong to any literary school or literary movement, but unlike Spark, readers read her works again and again to understand the essence of the content, and enjoy it again and again. Her writing style is completely new, unique, confusing and even frightening, and will delight readers" [7].

In addition to her critical examination of social issues, Spark's use of metafiction and unreliable narrators adds another layer of complexity to her narratives. By employing these techniques, she prompts readers to question the nature of reality and the reliability of narrative authority. The blending of reality with fiction challenges traditional storytelling conventions and invites readers to engage more critically with the text[28].

Alan Bold, British literary critic notes that, in addition to her literary work, there is a discussion of the postmodern techniques she used in her works, including irony and parody. In Spark's novels, she often leaves certain elements open to interpretation, leading to ambiguity in the story [29]. Critics appreciated her active participation of readers in the process of reading stories and novels and the ability to draw their own conclusions after reading the work. Analysts recognize her significant influence on postmodern literature and emphasize the unique combination of postmodern elements in her creative works [8]. Patrick Parrinder, former Professor of English Literature at the University of Reading, describes Spark as follows: "Clever, though a writer of elegance and high intellect, lacks emotional satisfaction and intellectual confidence in her writings. She is a truly unsettling writer because she disturbs the very core of our beliefs and deeply affects the way we think about writing novels" [9]. The critical opinions given above confirm the writer's success in breaking the mold of literary realistic traditions. She did not write to give any emotional satisfaction, but she misled the expectations of what the novel would be like.

Spark's approach often reveals the discrepancies between appearance and reality, emphasizing how societal roles and personal identities are constructed and manipulated. Her characters frequently confront and challenge these constructs, reflecting broader societal tensions and conflicts. Through her innovative narrative strategies and thematic concerns, Spark not only provides a critique of contemporary social norms but also offers insights into the psychological struggles that accompany societal pressures. In 1957, an English writer and literary critic Evelyn Waugh wrote a review under the title "Something fresh" [10] where he mentioned Spark's "Comforters" came to him on the verge of completion of his "The Ordeal of Gilbert Pinfold" and noted: - "I admire Spark's skill in writing this work" [11]. As, both writers converted to Catholicism at that time, many autobiographical features could be found in both works [30].

Famous British literary critic and scientist Frank Kermode in his "The Genesis of Secrecy: On the Interpretation of Narrative" [12] adds a lot of information about the Scottish writer, Spark. In this essay, Kermode mainly explores Spark's return to irony, her unique style in her novels, specifically emphasis on irony is essential for complex and often enigmatic stories. He explored how Spark's novels challenge traditional interpretations and encourage readers to analyze the text more deeply. In particular, Kermode, as the author of the novel "The Comforters", widely introduced Spark to the public. In an interview with Spark, he recalled his sentence that the plot of the work is based on a simple myth: "This book is based on your myth."

Patricia Waugh, British author and literary critic explores the concept of metafiction, which includes self-consciousness and referential elements in fiction. In the context of Muriel Spark, Waugh examines how Spark's works relate to the genre of metafiction in literature, and how Spark contributed to it. Spark's works are rich in literary allusions and intertextual references. Literary critics often study her interpretations of the interrelationship of tradition and culture.

Ruth Whitaker, British writer and literary critic analyzed the signs and principles of postmodern literature reflected in Spark's works, the themes and concepts chosen by the writer and their correlation with the style of writing. For example, the article "The Politics of Ambivalence: Muriel Spark's Loitering with Intent" analyzed the extent to which the themes of the postmodern period in the novel "Loitering with Intent" reflected political, social and economic aspects.

In summary, Spark's novels demonstrate a correlation between narrative style and themes. Her critical realism not only sheds light on the social and psychological aspects of her characters, but also directs the analysis of the text, its scenes reflecting reality and identity through the development of different perspectives.

## 5. Conclusion

Muriel Spark's novels open the way to critical realism by skillfully filling the social demand and spiritual void. Her story-telling style and the images of her characters combine the external and internal perception of a person, and create the basis of interpersonal relations between the individual and the society. Spark's critical realism is

manifested in the life path of the characters she created under the interaction of hidden social pressures and psychological conflicts.

Spark's works demonstrate her knowledge of the social and psychological factors that influence the nature and identity of individual behavior. Through the use of female characters, she criticizes gender stereotypes in the context of gender relations, and explores concepts such as

compromise and rebellion. The characters of the novels usually show the tension between personal desires and social restrictions, and personal struggles against social demands. Female characters facing a series of difficulties sharply criticize traditional gender roles and promote the principle of self-realization and independent living.

In addition, the author's use of metafiction and unreliable narrators complicates the process of understanding the works. Disruption of the traditional narrative form makes it difficult for readers to understand the nature of reality and the credibility of the narrator. From the grounding perspectives of fiction such as reality, truth, and dream, Spark directs readers to rethink their understanding of society and power, resulting in increased elements of critical realism in her works.

Spark's non-traditional storytelling principles address current issues in society, highlight the gaps between reality and imagination, and shed light on how social norms and interpersonal relationships are constructed and governed. Therefore, by reading the novels, it offers a critical analysis of the social and psychological problems of that time, creates insights about the impact of society's demands on individual life.

In short, this study emphasizes the relevance of Muriel Spark's literary work in the world of contemporary literature. The contribution of her critical realism to the understanding of human social and psychological complexities is immeasurable.

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