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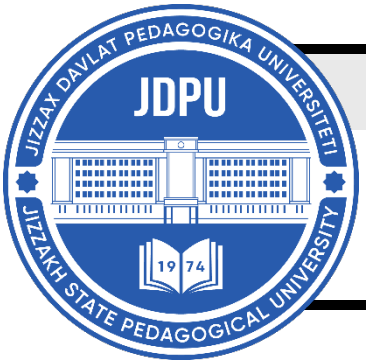

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CRAFTING COMPLEX FEMALE CHARACTERS IN MURIEL SPARK'S WORKS

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Abstract: In Muriel Spark's works, particularly novels such as "The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie" and "Aiding and Abetting", female characters embody the complexities of postm odern feminist themes. Spark's storytelling techniques, which combine critical realism with irony and metafiction, offer nuanced depictions of women navigating society's expectations and personal ambitions. Her characters, such as Miss Jean Brody and Beat Pappenheim, challenge conventional roles through independence, intelligence, and introspection. Spark's exploration of psychological depth and social critique is in line with broader trends in postmodern literature that depict women not as passive figures but as active agents shaping their own destinies within evolving cultural landscapes.

INTRODUCTION

In postmodern literature, the depiction of women is shaped through various unconventional methods, resulting in a new interpretation of the female figure. This process considers the historical-cultural context, including the societal role, rights, duties, and opportunities available to women of that era. It encompasses the gradual development of postmodern feminism, which ultimately contributed to the emergence of the second wave of feminism in the 1960s and 1970s. In the first wave, demands included voting rights, legal equality, and educational rights. Additionally, the analysis and critique of gender roles and

identities as social constructs were emphasized. The concept of "social construction" describes how truth and knowledge are created, maintained, and altered within a society through human interactions. Over time, women's positions in society have significantly changed, reflected in their opportunities to work in various fields, expanded educational rights, and increased political rights. Such changes directly influenced the creation of active and independent female characters in literature.

Postcolonial and intersectional theories play crucial roles in analyzing contemporary social, cultural, and political issues. Postcolonial theory addresses colonialism, its legacy, and the social, cultural, and political conditions in former colonies, primarily analyzing the impacts of colonialism and their current manifestations. Intersectional theory studies how various forms of social injustice and inequality intersect, highlighting the interconnectedness of race, gender, class, sexual orientation, ability, and other factors. Postmodern literature embraces cultural diversity under the influence of globalization. Female figures are portrayed through different cultural experiences from various nations, cultures, and races. Inspired by mass culture and media, these unconventional female images are depicted in various professions, such as pop culture, cinema, and television. For example, Canadian writer Margaret Atwood's "The Handmaid's Tale" offers strong commentary on gender roles and women's societal positions[1:336]. Toni Morrison's "Beloved" reflects the historical experiences of African-American women [2:321]. "Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit" by Jeanette Winterson explores gender and sexual orientation issues [3:176].

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The process of shaping female figures in postmodern literature is comprehensive and complex, incorporating various aspects of the historical-cultural context. These literary works deconstruct traditional gender roles and express the diversity of women's experiences. Female characters are depicted as complex and multifaceted individuals who not only fulfill daily tasks but also possess their own social standing, voice, and independence. This complexity often portrays them as independent thinkers and multifaceted individuals, distinguishing them from traditional "weak" or "innocent" female images.

In metafictional works, female characters often appear as strong individuals who understand their lives and social roles, reflecting on their actions and experiences. These characters are active participants in historical events rather than passive observers, depicted in new, free, and diverse ways, sometimes as enigmatic figures. In literature, the depiction of women's psychological dramas showcases advanced creative tendencies of world prose. Philosophical-psychological and symbolic-imaginary elements dominate in portraying

women's roles in society, their profound emotions, and complex mental worlds. The key task is to explore the psyche of a particular character through new interpretations of imagery and expression [4:4].

The formation of female figures in Muriel Spark's work is a delicate yet complex process, enriched with various social, cultural, and psychological aspects. Indian researcher Dr. Ganesh describes Spark's skill in creating characters: "Her characters reflect the complexity, fullness, and diversity of humanity. She depicts aging, indecision, inability to marry, jealousy, suffering, and other traits as universal human characteristics"[5:3]. Spark's female characters often go through a self-realization process, striving to fulfill their desires and ambitions. They face and overcome conflicts and struggles, encountering social pressures and cultural clichés, asserting control over their lives, and making decisions about their destiny. This journey of independence and self-awareness portrays them as strong and determined individuals. Dr. Ganesh continues: "She skillfully depicts the intensifying envy and later animosity as one finds another rival, recognizing jealousy and hatred as fundamental human weaknesses"[5:3].

Spark's female characters possess deep psychological complexity, facing internal conflicts and emotional struggles that reveal their inner worlds and human qualities. To depict women's psychology, Spark employs various elements, expressing their thoughts, emotions, and actions. Themes of uniqueness, desire, ambition, and determination are explored. Dialogue is used to convey the inner worlds, thoughts, and emotions of female characters, focusing on their conversations and relationships to express anxieties, fears, desires, and motivations. Symbols, such as mirrors, birds, or specific objects, represent inner struggles and societal demands associated with femininity. Spark sometimes employs unreliable narrators or shifts perspectives to present different views of women's psyches, allowing her to explore the subjective nature of experience and perception. Through her characters' experiences, she highlights the challenges and restrictions women face in various social contexts.

Spark's literary style often incorporates critical realism, depicting the lives and experiences of female characters realistically to highlight societal injustices and issues. This approach reveals the everyday lives and social problems of female characters, portraying them as realistic figures. Spark's female characters confront gender equality issues and societal conflicts, with their feminist experiences and societal roles thoroughly examined, enriching their personalities and emotions. Many of Spark's female characters feel isolated, which helps preserve their individuality and find their place in life. Themes of loneliness and individuality reveal their personal qualities through internal struggles.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

"Bang Bang You Are Dead" is the story, which refers to African period and illuminates the memory of a woman who lived there and shared her memories via reels belonging to eighteen years back[6:126]. It's a third person narration, though, while describing the events happened with that lady, Sybil, the writer in most cases shows her sympathy towards her. The main themes of the story are loneliness, ignorance, confusion, shooting affairs and flashback of the past times. Sybil, the main character seems to be an extraordinary person with high intellectual morals and concepts of life. At the end of the story, which is written in an unusual way, the main character, a woman, asks herself the question – "Am I a woman or a talented beast? " [7:121]. Spark's style is often filled with critique and irony. Female characters' behavior, actions, and experiences are portrayed ironically, critiquing societal clichés and stereotypes, deepening their portrayal.

In Spark's novel "The Comforters," the protagonist Caroline Rose is depicted as a complex and unique character, undergoing a journey of self-discovery and self-awareness [8:224]. She questions her life and seeks meaning, evaluating herself critically and discovering principles of individuality. In "The Comforters," Caroline is pursued by an author who narrates and controls her actions, finding herself trapped in a predictable narrative. This postmodern style distinguishes Caroline, enriching her portrayal. She is psychologically complex, hearing voices and viewing her life as a literary work, striving to understand and control her mental state.

Spark's critical realism is evident in Caroline's depiction, highlighting her life and issues realistically to critique societal injustices and stereotypes. Caroline Rose is portrayed as an independent woman, challenging traditional roles and stereotypes, seeking her place in life. From a feminist perspective, she is depicted as a strong, independent, and self-assured woman.

Spark encourages readers to think rather than feel, revealing inner aspects through her narratives, engaging other book enthusiasts. She lightly depicts themes like madness and evil, questioning the concept of "truth" to reflect historical reality.

In The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie, the main character, Miss Jean Brodie, embodies the complexities and conflicts of female independence and power[9:160]. Miss Brodie is described as a strong-willed and charismatic teacher who has a significant influence on her students. It challenges traditional methods of education and encourages its students to embrace art, politics and personal development. However, her character also reflects the dark side of control and manipulation, highlighting the complexity of power dynamics and the effects of authoritarianism. Through Miss Brody, Spark explores themes of loyalty, betrayal, and the consequences of believing in one's ideals. The novel presents a nuanced portrayal of a woman

who is both empowering and oppressive, reflecting the multifaceted nature of female power. Miss Brodie's influence on her students is profound, shaping their personalities and futures, but it raises questions about the moral implications of her methods and beliefs.

In "Memento Mori", Spark explores the lives of elderly women, exploring themes of death, memory and the passage of time [10:224]. The female characters in this novel are portrayed in a combination of realism and dark humor, confronting the inevitability of death and the complexities of aging. Spark's image of older women fights against stereotypes in society, showing them as individuals with a rich inner life and a unique worldview. The novel examines issues of dignity, respect, and the lingering effects of past relationships and experiences. Spark's use of dark humor and irony in Memento Mori adds depth to her portrayal of female characters and provides a critical examination of society's attitudes toward aging and death. The novel's exploration of memory and the past highlights the enduring importance of personal histories and the ways in which they shape personal identity.

The novel "Aiding and Abetting" is rich for various postmodern techniques and elements [11:176]. Some of them are analyzed as following: "Aiding and Abetting" employs metafictional techniques, blurring the boundaries between the fictional world and the act of writing itself. Spark plays with the reader's expectations, making self-referential comments and questioning the nature of storytelling and the role of the author. The novel utilizes a fragmented narrative structure, presenting multiple perspectives and non-linear timelines. Spark's use of different narrative voices and perspectives adds complexity to the story, reflecting the postmodern idea that truth is subjective and reality is multifaceted. Spark incorporates intertextual references and allusions to other works of literature, historical events, and popular culture [12:204].

In Muriel Spark's "Aiding and Abetting", the female protagonist, Beat Pappenheim, is a complex and interesting character. She is a former psychiatric patient turned therapist, which gives her a unique perspective on human behavior and a deep understanding of psychological subtleties. Beat demonstrates an ability to manipulate those around her, using her knowledge of psychology to control and influence her patients. Despite her outward confidence, she is affected by paranoia due to her past and fear of exposure due to her involvement in questionable affairs. Beat is very intelligent and sensitive, reads people correctly and exploits their weaknesses. Her actions often raise moral questions, operating in a morally gray area without a clear moral compass. Throughout the novel, she displays remarkable resilience and resourcefulness, overcoming challenges with a calm and calculated demeanor. Beat's past as a psychiatric patient continues to influence her present, leaving deep psychological scars that shape her behavior and relationships. At her core, she is driven by a strong instinct of self-

preservation, ready to compromise her principles in order to protect herself and maintain her position.

CONCLUSION

Muriel Spark's wide-ranging oeuvre shows that her depiction of female characters transcends traditional literary traditions. Through a deft use of critical realism, irony, and metafiction, Spark navigates the complexities of societal expectations and personal ambitions, offering nuanced portrayals of women struggling with identity and agency. Characters such as Miss Jean Brodie and Beat Pappenheim challenge stereotypes with independence, intelligence, and introspection, embodying the emerging feminist discourse in postmodern literature.

Spark's exploration of female characters extends beyond mere representation, it delves into the existential and philosophical dimensions of their lives. Through intricate narratives and symbolic imagery, she probes the depths of human consciousness, revealing the inner struggles and moral dilemmas faced by her protagonists. Whether grappling with themes of mortality in "Memento Mori" or navigating the blurred boundaries of reality and fiction in "Aiding and Abetting," Spark's literary craftsmanship illuminates the complexities of existence itself. Her characters, often confronting isolation and societal expectations, emerge as resilient figures challenging the status quo and advocating for personal autonomy.

Spark's ability to blend profound psychological insight with sharp social commentary positions her as a pioneering voice in XX-century literature, enriching our understanding of gender dynamics, human relationships, and the enduring quest for individual identity.Spark's exploration of psychological depth and social critique reflects a broader cultural shift, presenting women not as passive subjects but as active agents shaping their destinies. Her stories deal deeply with themes of power, autonomy, and the complex dynamics of human relationships, often revealing the weaknesses and strengths inherent in her characters' journeys.

Spark's work continues to resonate as an insightful commentary on the multifaceted nature of women's experience, challenging readers to rethink established norms and perspectives. Spark will leave a lasting legacy that illuminates the complexities of gender, identity, and the human condition in literature through her unique literary style and deep characters.

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