

UNIT 1 THE ENGLISH NOVEL : MODERNISM AND AFTER

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1.0 OBJECTIVES

In the previous Block, we studied E.M Forster's *A Passage to India* (1924). In this Block we shall study a novel published in 1961. What happened to the development of the novel in the interim? What kinds of novels were written between the two World Wars and after?

This unit is an introductory one and it gives us a background to the modern English novel. It is about the major shifts in literary perspective which marked the fiction written after the Second World War. It also discusses the outstanding narrative modes of post-War fiction along with examples of prominent authors and texts. This Unit will give you a feel of the literature written during these times and will help you understand better the issues raised by Muriel Spark in *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie*.

1.1 BACKGROUND

English literature of the early twentieth century is marked by a definite sense of transition. Two significant fiction writers, Virginia Woolf and D.H. Lawrence, identified 1910 and 1915 respectively as the years when the human character changed and the old world order collapsed. From then onwards, we may say, the parameters of thought and writing underwent drastic changes, signalling the advent of Modernism.

Modernist writing exploded the long-preserved myth of universal human nature. It acknowledged the breakdown of the pre-industrial way of life and economy and was influenced by urbanisation, destruction of reason, and the resultant uncertainties of the first World War. These issues loomed large in the consciousness of the writers whose works reflected apocalyptic, crisis-centred views of history. Literature conveyed the sense of bleakness, alienation, disintegration, futility and anarchy that had engulfed the human psyche. As a result, undertones of extreme self-consciousness, introversion and scepticism crept into literature. Elements of the anti-representational came to the fore as poetry revelled in *vers libre* or *free verse* and the novel took to the stream-of-consciousness narrative.

The end of World War II brought about the birth of what W.H. Auden in 1947 called "the age of anxiety". The nightmarish realities of the battlefield had imprinted themselves on the psyche of man who had to come to terms with the destruction and desolation of the nuclear bomb, widespread massacres, new borders and fallen regimes. The sense of holocaust dominated the sensibility of the years that followed. The post-War world marked, in a way, the end of Modernism with the deaths of literary giants like James Joyce, Virginia Woolf and

W.B. Yeats. A new strain of liberalism was born and Lionel Trilling, in his book *The Liberal Imagination* (1950), called for moral realism that would embody the tragic sense of life that literature should reflect.

In fiction lay the possibility of sensitive expression of human scepticism which was higher than politics and deeper than a social report. Literature saw the world in its human multiplicity and variety, and was capable of portraying the contradiction and ambiguity that lay beyond the parameters of ideology and certainty. One important aspect of this new strain of writing was the variability of human nature which novels dealt with against the characteristic backdrop of the working or lower middle-classes. The protagonists moved along in life imbued with a sense of alienation and beset by a sense of anguish.

Novelists and their protagonists were seen to possess a strange sense of purposelessness which prevented them from comprehending reasons for their existence. Samuel Beckett's writing, which initiated the "Theatre of the Absurd", went a long way in reinforcing this particular tendency which revolutionised trends in contemporary writing. The mathematical term "surd", which stands for what cannot be expressed in finite terms of number and quantity, came to symbolise the amorphous attitudes that the literature of the times tended to reflect and underlined the fact that realism was no longer a reliable entity.

We have to make a distinction here between the "old" *avant-garde*, which faded away in the 1940s and the "new" *avant-garde* which is postmodernist. Modernism in literature, to put it succinctly, reveals a breaking away from established patterns, traditions and conventions, and tries to offer fresh perspectives on the human being's position and function in the universe by experimenting greatly with form and style.

Postmodernism is an extension of the preceding trends and is rather amorphous in nature. Such writing consciously rejects symbols of authority and adopts an eclectic approach. It contains techniques like expressing random, unaccountable experiences that guide acts of creativity, parody and pastiche with their imitative undertones; and the element of chance also plays a significant role. The *nouveau-roman* and the anti-novel also surface as manifestations of postmodernism. Plot, action, narrative and analysis of character are often seen to be extraneous as the novel is taken to be a medium that portrays the individual version and vision of things. Franz Kafka, James Joyce, Marcel Proust, and Samuel Beckett had shown post-War writers the way in this particular regard.

This gave rise to the allied cult of the anti-novel in which a sustained plot was absent and which was characterised by detailed analysis of objects, many repetitions, variations of the time sequence, and erratic beginnings and endings. The fiction of the 1950s was experimental and had shades of the anti-ideological and the realistic. Strong social concerns came to engross the attention of the fiction writers. Alongside these, we also notice that writers tended to place man within a community.

1.2 MODES OF NARRATION

In this section of the Unit we look at some of the most significant modes of fiction in the post-World War scenario. The outstanding exponents of these modes, along with their representative works, also find a mention within this section.

1.2.1 Narratives of Nostalgia

Fiction in Britain showed diversity and resilience in the 1950s. A kind of atavistic nostalgia impelled some writers to look for man's origins and his lost innocence, and displayed a yearning for the good, old days. These impulses were often mythologised and what emerged was a distinct distaste for civilisation, materialism, industrialism and progress, and a conscious creation of the cult of the "noble savage". William Golding's *Lord of the Flies* (1954), *The Inheritors* (1955) and *Pincher Martin* (1956), along with Saul Bellow's *Henderson the Rain King* (1959), belong to this category of fiction. They embody the timelessness of a myth representing the pessimistic vision of the human predilection towards evil which lies at the other end of innocence. Conversely, Aldous Huxley depicted a utopian way of life in *Island* (1966).

1.2.2 Roman-Fleuve

The *roman-fleuve* also achieved popularity as it consisted of a series of novels, each a separate, unified piece in itself, but interrelated as some characters reappear in each successive work. Initiated by Balzac and Zola, the tradition finds an exponent in C.P. Snow with his *Strangers and Brothers* sequence (1940-70), which is a document of English social history from 1925; in Henry Williamson's *A Chronicle of Ancient Sunlight* (1951-69) in fifteen volumes; and Anthony Powell's *A Dance to the Music of Time* (1951-76) in twelve volumes.

1.2.3 Political Narratives

Political allegory was one of the modes that fiction turned to after the War. George Orwell's *Animal Farm* (1945) is one of the first of these works of the post-war era. It is ostensibly an animal fable but, between the lines, it satirizes the totalitarianism that threatened to engulf the world. The book is an allegory of Stalin's treachery with Trotsky, his betrayal of the revolutionary cause and his subsequent strategies for survival. In another novel, *Nineteen Eighty Four* (1949), Orwell reiterates the same idea against a framework of power equations, the weapons of propaganda, the scheme of terror and authoritarianism. It is an example of the anti-utopian fable that contains the spirit of the perverted realism of the times.

John Osborne's play *Look Back In Anger* (1956) gave currency to the term "angry young man". This is used to describe protagonists who were not angry in the strict sense of the term but were only disgruntled with themselves and their shabby environment. Despite the writer vociferously disclaiming the label, the term has come to define those who choose to defy established norms and mores. Kingsley Amis' *Lucky Jim* (1954) is perhaps the best illustration of this sort of novel and the protagonist Jim's anger is directed both against himself, for being trapped, as against those who have trapped him in a world of hypocrisy and convention.

1.2.4 Narratives of Morality

The modern condition is portrayed sensitively in the works of Graham Greene. Set against seedy landscapes, his writing focuses on espionage, treachery, moral and political confusion that pervades the real world. Greene usually focuses on some ambiguous moral issue as "the heart of the matter" in his major novels. In *The Confidential Agent* (1939) it is pity, and later in *The Human Factor* (1978) it is gratitude. Greene, a Catholic, explained that the significance of religion in a novel lay in the fact that it upheld the factor of the human act in fiction and his post-war work is a testimony to this belief. Nihilistic undertones can also be identified in Greene's writing which often describes the strange effects of good causes and the self-destructive tendencies in the compassionate. *The Heart Of The Matter* (1948) and *The End of the Affair* (1951) are two examples of this proclivity or tendency.

1.2.5 Ironic Documentary

An outstanding exponent of ironic documentary—another post-war trend—is Evelyn Waugh. Resorting to parody and farce, he is a satirist whose characters value themselves a bit too highly and are then made to face absurd situations. Waugh can be considered the chief creator of "black humour" in modern British fiction. In *The Ordeal of Gilbert Pinfold* (1957) is contained an account of an artist whose creative powers have deserted him and who undertakes a sea voyage to recover from this debility. Recovery comes in the form of hallucinations as he struggles to overcome the combined effects of personal ill-health, drugs and the rough seas. These hallucinations comprise the novel which is also a self-portrait of its creator, a Waugh/Pinfold entity that sees escape in these visions. Waugh's world is one of comic absurdity in which his characters lack psychological depth and live through chaotic situations that lie beyond any moral law. This technique serves to emphasize the sense of alienation and meaninglessness that characterise the modern world.

Anthony Burgess, a Catholic like Graham Greene, is known for his comic realism and his interest in language and etymology. His chief thematic concerns were the sense of sin and a consciousness of disaster on the social plane. His two well-known works, *The Clockwork Orange* (1962) and *The Wanting Seed* (1962), are apocalyptic fables that satirise human absurdity. The former is set in a socialist society where, among other ills, language has declined and Alex, the hooligan narrator, is de-emotionalised with the result that his devotion to music, the aesthetic recourse of this otherwise violent personality, is lost forever and he comes to symbolise a typically conformist member of a socialist regime.

1.2.7 Voices of Women

The 1950s are marked by a proliferation of women writers whose works seem to rise from the changed realities following the catastrophic experience of the War. The post-war social, economic and cultural patterns radically altered the nature of reality for women, bringing in its wake new opportunities for them. The questions of identity, career, sexual and economic freedom, became issues for conscious decisions rather than being subjects for hope and speculation. Women novelists like Doris Lessing and Iris Murdoch reflect these concerns in their works. Their sensibility, transmuted with great finesse into their creations, is reflected in the ability to conceive women characters who neither totally conform to, nor are they in sustained conflict with, their masculine counterparts. They appear as personalities with an identity of their own and symbolise a microcosm of historical and personal conflicts that affect society. Muriel Spark's writing is also a testimony to this rich and diverse trend in twentieth century fiction.

Lessing's fiction usually takes up the concerns of identity and art in an environment where systems collapse and require an evolution of consciousness. Her first novel, *The Grass is Singing* (1950), is concerned with the conflict between White interests and Black survival in an Africa torn apart by apartheid. Her formidable five-volume "Children of Violence" sequence (1952-69) is an account of the protagonist's initial sense of non-existence in the flux of history to her gradual admittance and procurement of a place in it. The sequence takes up the contradictory concerns of being and nullification at the same time, thereby symbolising the predicaments of countless modern-day women. *The Golden Notebook* (1962) is a remarkable portrait of a woman for whom personal identity and a sense of incompleteness create a crisis of self. This crisis has wider connotations as it reflects the moral and intellectual crises of the age. Lessing's characters seem to be in danger of drowning in the collective political and psychological consciousness but are able to claw their way back from disintegration through a reintegration of consciousness.

Iris Murdoch's works, displaying her talent for humour, are marked by a sense of alienation, degeneration and protest. Her first novel, *Under the Net* (1954), contains debates about the nature of language through Jake, a writer cast in the mould of the anti-hero, who is concerned with his own silence and his equation with the world. He comes to symbolise the writer's interest in portraying a new moral philosophy that upholds the supremacy of good above all else. *The Sandcastle* (1957) is set against the background of an English school. The Headmaster has a brief extra-marital affair with an artist commissioned to do a painting for the school. Ultimately fear triumphs, as his sense of duty, obligation and socially-dictated pragmatism come in the way of any long-term commitment. Murdoch's characters either stand steadfast in their commitment and become morbidly grim or vacillate between experiences due to the absence of fixed patterns in their lives. In this contrast lies her philosophy of life which, by portraying the spectacle of human drama, emphasizes the nature and power of goodness.

Muriel Spark's novels are clever and entertaining as they reflect humour and irony. Not only does her writing arouse the reader's sensibility and emotion, but it also stimulates the intellect by piecing experience into patterns which characters identify with or seek to assimilate. The conflict between good and evil overshadows events as her fictive characters struggle to comprehend truth and values. Her latest novel, *Reality and Dreams* (1996), and almost all her other works are living testimonies of her philosophy of life. Aspects of her writing will be discussed in greater detail in Units 2, 3 and 4.

1.2.8 Detective Fiction

Another mode of fiction that deserves mention is the detective story. It involves crime, usually an insoluble murder, a variety of suspects, and a seasoned detective who finds the solution with impeccable logic and reasoning. A number of writers are known for this sophisticated form of fiction. Dorothy L. Sayers, Margery Allingham, Agatha Christie and P.D. James worked on certain basic formulas with necessary modifications and laid stress on characterisation and social comment. Others like Elisabeth Ferrari, Lionel Black and Colin Dexter experimented freely as they were influenced by the tough and ruthless detectives of the American crime novels and police procedures.

1.2.9 Vision Literature/Science Fiction

The "vision literature" of the Middle Ages, which explored the metaphysical world of heaven, hell and purgatory, saw its manifestation in the post-war era in the form of science fiction. It aspired to explore the unknown. The trend, set very much earlier by Mary Shelley in *Frankenstein* (1818), continued after the War and the spectre of the nuclear bomb haunted the minds of many. H.G. Wells' *The Shape of Things To Come* (1933) typified this kind of writing. Isaac Asimov wrote a wide variety of such fiction, notable amongst which is *I Robot* (1957). John Wyndham, in the 1950's, published a series of novels that amalgamated old-fashioned romance with modern science fiction by depicting ordinary people caught up in desperate struggles for survival. His outstanding contributions are *The Kraken Wakes* (1953) and *The Midwich Cuckoos* (1957). Arthur C. Clarke is another major writer of the times and is specially known for *Childhood's End* (1953) and *The City and The Stars* (1956).

Modern fiction oscillates between voices that endeavour to explore new aesthetic avenues of expression and others that seek to critically represent contemporary life. David Lodge, in his book *The Novelist at the Crossroads* (1969), sums it up remarkably well by asserting that the novelist has arrived at a metaphoric crossroad as his/her legacy is a mixture of many trends and traditions. The writer has to choose between the traditional paths of realism or the untrodden ones of experiment. Despite misgivings, post-war fiction has thrived as an authoritative profile of artistic, cultural and intellectual viewpoints of the times.

1.3 LET US SUM UP

In this Unit we have read about the literary scenario after the two World Wars. We have looked at the subsequent emergence of the trends of Modernism and Postmodernism and have seen the immense variety and vitality that contemporary fiction displayed.

1.4 QUESTIONS

1. Trace the development of modern English fiction with specific reference to the major shifts in literary perspective.
2. Discuss the outstanding modes of British fiction written after the second World War.
3. Identify the essential features of fiction written by women during the post-war years.

1.5 SUGGESTED READING

1. Frederick R. Karl, *A Reader's Guide to The Contemporary English Novel*, London ; Thomas and Hudson, 1972.
2. David Lodge, *The Novelist at the Crossroads*, London : Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1971.
3. Malcolm Bradbury, *Modernism*, Penguin, 1991.
4. Malcolm Bradbury, *The Modern British Novel*, Penguin, 1993.

UNIT 2 MURIEL SPARK – HER LIFE, HER WORKS AND THE TEXT

Structure

- 2.0 Objectives
- 2.1 The Life of Muriel Spark
- 2.2 The Works Of Muriel Spark
 - 2.2.1 Her Poetry
 - 2.2.2 Her Short Stories
 - 2.2.3 Her Novels
 - 2.2.4 Her Plays
 - 2.2.5 Biography and Criticism
- 2.3 The Text: A Summary of *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie*
 - 2.3.1 Chapter 1
 - 2.3.2 Chapter 2
 - 2.3.3 Chapter 3
 - 2.3.4 Chapter 4
 - 2.3.5 Chapter 5
 - 2.3.6 Chapter 6
- 2.4 Let Us Sum Up
- 2.5 Questions
- 2.6 Suggested Reading

2.0 OBJECTIVES

In the beginning of this Unit, we shall look briefly at the life of Muriel Spark and a short resume of some of her important works. Then follows a chapter-wise summary of *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie*. These two aspects are important because they help us understand the attitudes of the writer and appreciate the evolution of her art. *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie* is a novel that has strong autobiographical undertones. It can be better understood if we are familiar with the important events in the author's life and are aware of her perceptions about literature.

2.1 THE LIFE OF MURIEL SPARK

Muriel Spark was born in 1918 in Edinburgh, Scotland. She was the daughter of Bernard Camberg, a Jewish engineer. Her mother, Sarah Elizabeth Maud, was of Italian descent.

Muriel Spark was educated at the James Gillespie's School for Girls which she has fictionalised in her novel *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie*. She left school in 1935 and got a teaching job in a small private day school. Here she preferred to get free tuition in shorthand and typing rather than a salary and this experience stood her in good stead in later life when she was able to type the manuscripts of her own works.

In 1937 she got engaged to Sydney Oswald Spark who sailed to Southern Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe) to work as a teacher. Muriel joined him there after a few months and they got married. Her marital life was a turbulent one as her husband began to show signs of mental instability and had fits of violence.

Two years later, the second World War broke out and S.O. Spark had to join the army. It was then that Muriel decided to press for divorce, which came through in 1942. She sailed back to England in 1944 despite the dangers of being torpedoed by German submarines on the way. Once in London, she worked at the Political Intelligence Department of the Foreign Office. This involved her active participation in psychological warfare that endeavoured to camouflage anti-Nazi propaganda.

A year after the War, Spark found a job in a good quarterly magazine called *Argenter*. Here she got a grounding in editing, proof-reading and copy-editing. The experience helped her when, in the spring of 1947, she took over as the editor of the *Poetry Review*. She was only

twenty-nine then and had joined the Poetry Society as a member just a year before. Her enthusiastic advocacy of Modernism antagonised members who, after initially expressing displeasure, eventually called for her dismissal. Spark left the Society in 1948 and founded a poetry magazine of her own called *Forum*. She continued to write poetry and finally published her collection, *The Fanfarlo and Other Verse* in 1952.

An important event in her life is her conversion to Roman Catholicism. Spark acknowledges that one of the major influences that brought about this conversion was the theological writings of John Henry Newman. In 1954 she was received into the Church of Rome and in *Curriculum Vitae*, her autobiography, she states, "I felt the Roman Catholic faith corresponded to what I had always felt and known and believed. There was no blinding revelation....the existential quality of a religious experience cannot simply be summed up in general terms." She later claimed that she began writing her novels only after she became a Roman Catholic and saw life in its totality rather than as a series of disconnected occurrences.

For some time, in the early fifties, Spark took a part-time job in the magazine *European Affairs* and also worked with Peter Owen, the publisher. Around the same time she began writing her first novel, *The Comforters*, which was eventually published in 1957. With this publication came financial security and Muriel Spark moved to Rome in 1966. This city, which continues to be her home even today, forms the backdrop of many of her novels.

Spark's writings have brought her critical acclaim and recognition. In 1951 she won a national short story competition organised by *The Observer*. She has been honoured with the Italia prize and the James Tait Black Memorial Prize. In 1967 she was named Commander, Order of the British Empire.

2.2 THE WORKS OF MURIEL SPARK

Muriel Spark, in her autobiography, *Curriculum Vitae*, states that "all experience is good for an artist" and the "essentials" of literature "lie out in the world". This claim is corroborated in her works which are born out of some of her most memorable experiences. Her involvement in the Intelligence Department of the Foreign Office is reflected in the psychological warfare indulged in by her characters as they seek to carve out their respective places within their environment. It is also reflected in her tendency to camouflage facts and draw out, through them, the truths relating to fiction.

Spark sees life as a chaotic state and strongly believes that it is for the novelist to perceive and evolve an order out of it. In her writings she endeavours to present the authorial perspective through the varied voices of her characters. The mundane and the trivial are transformed through reinterpretations that represent the vital issues and aspects of life. This truth, which emerges through fictive situations and characters, is what Spark aspires to present in her writings.

A prolific writer, she began her literary career as a poet at the age of nine. During her sojourn in Africa she took to writing short stories but finally adopted the novel as her preferred medium for creative writing.

2.2.1 Poetry

When she went to Rhodesia at the age of nineteen, Spark wrote some poetry and many short stories. Her poems were then published in 1952 in a collection called *The Fanfarlo and Other Verse*. In 1967 appeared *Collected Poems I* and in 1982 she published another collection called *Sotheby's and Poems*. Drawn from experiences in her personal life, Spark's poetry is subjective and lyrical.

2.2.2 Short Stories

Africa serves as the inspiration and background of many of Spark's short stories and novels. In "The Go-Away Bird", a short story written after a poem with the same title, Muriel Spark describes the homesickness felt by the Whites in the alien continent of Africa. The story "Bang-Bang You're Dead" is based on a real-life incident that involved Spark's friend, Nita

McEwen, who was shot dead by her husband. In "The Curtain Blown by the Breeze", the writer describes the violent horrors of apartheid as she experienced it among the Rhodesian Whites. Spark was inspired by the Victoria Falls and subsequently wrote "The Seraph and the Zambesi", a story about the mystical experience of the river Zambesi's rain forest and the symbolic aridity of the White races. This story won a competition run by *The Observer* in 1951 and established Spark's reputation as a creative writer. For children, Muriel Spark has written *A Very Fine Clock* (1968). Like her poetry, Spark's short stories tend to fictionalise incidents from her own life.

2.2.3 · Novel

Her first novel, *The Comforters* (1957), was written shortly after her conversion to Roman Catholicism, a branch of Christianity founded by St. Peter in Rome. It combines the author's religious convictions and literary values while exploring the relationship between author and characters. The heroine, Caroline Rose, realises that she is a character in a novel and expresses her resistance to the plot imposed on her by the invisible author. Her attitudes reflect the conflict arising out of the clash between free will and pre-ordained existence. These realities have been summed up by Frank Kermode in "The House of Fiction" where he refers to *The Comforters* as "a novel about writing a novel". The title "describes the persecuting effect of 'voices' heard by the main character", writes Spark in her autobiography, *Curriculum Vitae*.

The second novel, *Robinson* (1958), takes up the story of plane-crash survivors marooned on an island. Only two men—Robinson and Miguel—inhabit the remote island of Robinson. The novel explores, in allegorical terms, Robinson, the man as well as the island. *Memento Mori* (1959) explores the metaphysical mystery of death. The story revolves round a group of elderly people who receive anonymous telephone calls, ostensibly from death itself, and are always made aware of their imminent mortality.

In her next novel, *The Ballad of Peckham Rye* (1960), Spark delves into the supernatural once again. It revolves round the demonic figure of Dougal Douglas, who, as a personnel assistant, is given the task of looking into the inner lives of workers and helping them to enhance their professional performance. His sinisterly charismatic personality foment trouble wherever he goes. The characters in *The Bachelors* (1960) are caught up, likewise, in a web of demonology, spiritualism and spurious beliefs. *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie* (1960) is a novel about a school teacher whose fascistic tendencies come to the fore and result in her enforced retirement. The book served as the basis of a highly successful film.

In *The Girls of Slender Means* (1963), Spark draws inspiration from her own life. Set in the post-war years, the novel harks back to 1947 when the author had to take up residence in a London hostel called the Helena Club. A fire in a girls' hostel is described as a catalytic event that transforms and places under judgement the lives of the inmates. Through Barbara Vaughan in *The Mandelbaum Gate* (1965), Spark describes Jerusalem, a city divided by the Mandelbaum Gate along religious and ethnic lines. It evokes the sense of divisiveness that characterises the Jewish, Christian and Arab populations of this ancient city. The sense of place is evoked again in *The Public Image* (1968). This novel is set in Rome and it explores the connections between reality and fiction by presenting the image-building industry that sustains filmdom. Frederick Christopher, resenting his wife's success as an actress, commits suicide in order to destroy her public image.

The conventional murder story is inverted in *The Driver's Seat* (1970). Lise, the victim, provides a twist in the tale by seeking out her own killer and, thereby, takes over from the novelist as an alternative plotmaker. Through her Spark poses the central question about who is in the driver's seat—the novelist or the character? Spark's next novel *Not to Disturb* (1971) is a thriller set in a stately home. At many places it parodies the traditional Gothic novel as the plot moves forward through the murder hunt. *The Hothouse by the East River* (1973) is set in New York in 1973 and in it the central conflict is between moral and metaphorical truth. It invokes psychological warfare that Spark describes so well after her stint in the Intelligence Department of the Foreign Office. Ethics and sanctity are the central thematic concerns portrayed in *The Abbess of Crewe* (1974). It is simultaneously a moral satire and a political allegory which revolves around the realities of electioneering. *The Takeover* (1976) is set in Italy and the plot has to do with the intrigues and fraud that surface in the world of

art. Set against the backdrop of Venice, *Territorial Rights* (1979) is about the blackmail and corruption that characterises big business interests.

In *Litering with Intent* (1981) Spark returns to an autobiographical heroine, Fleur Talbot, a novelist. The writer analyses the balance between fact and fiction and the novel becomes a self-conscious celebration of woman as artist in the twentieth century. Spark's fascination for Job is reflected in *The Only Problem* (1984). Job and his fortunes are the central focus in the Book of Job in the Old Testament of the Bible. The novel contains an account of Harvey Gotham who retires to France to write a monograph on the biblical character of Job. Vainly seeking peace and seclusion in daily life, Gotham finds modern-day counterparts of Job's persecutors and comforters constantly impinging on his time and inclinations.

A Far Cry from Kensington (1988) is based on Spark's experience at a part-time job at Falcon Press, London. It evokes the London of the 1950s and takes a sly, entertaining look at the publishing scene of those times. Insanity and religious mania are the predominant themes in *Symposium* (1990). Her latest novel, *Reality and Dreams* (1996), is set in London and revolves around the life of a filmmaker, Tom Richards. It is the story of a search for the right character by the filmmaker for whom all projects start as a dream prior to being presented before the audience as reality. Spark's fiction encompasses the mysterious nature of life in which truth lies beyond reason and is recognised through acts of faith. The contrariness of human nature is brought to the fore through paradox of situation and character.

2.2.4 Plays

Spark has written a number of radio plays. These include *The Interview* (1958), *The Dry River Bed* (1959), *The Ballad of Peckham Rye* (1960), and *Danger Zone* (1961). Her first full-length play, *Doctors of Philosophy*, was performed in London in 1962. It takes up a theme similar to that of her novel, *The Comforters*, which seeks to make a foray into the relationship shared by authors and their characters. In the play, characters are constantly aware that they are taking part in a dramatic situation and feel restricted by the pre-ordained roles given to them by the author. Spark dramatises the relationship that exists between the author as creator and the characters as the created.

2.2.5 Biography and Criticism

In the early 1950's, Muriel Spark worked on a few authors that particularly appealed to her literary sensibilities. With Derek Stanford, she edited a *Tribute to Wordsworth* on the centenary of the poet's death. She has also written a critical biography of Mary Shelley called *Child of Light* and has edited a selection of letters of the Brontës. Besides this she has also worked on the poet John Masefield.

2.3 THE TEXT : A SUMMARY OF THE PRIME OF MISS JEAN BRODIE

At this level, you don't really need a summary. And I expect that you have read the novel by now. What follows then will help you to recapitulate what you have already read. Keep the text handy for ready reference.

A careful reading of the summary will help you understand the critical analysis that follows this Unit. Quotations from the novel appear within quotes and are followed by page numbers given in brackets. This will help you locate them easily in the novel. The particular edition from which the quotations have been taken is the one published by Macmillan in 1961.

2.3.1 Chapter I

The novel, set in Edinburgh, Scotland, revolves round Miss Jean Brodie, a teacher in the Marcia Blaine School for Girls. It is in the autumn of 1930 that the book opens and the school's staid atmosphere, characterised by tradition and conformity, is shaken by Miss Brodie's presence. She views herself as "a leaven in the lump" (p.7), a kind of progressive rebel who adopts extremely unconventional modes of educating the impressionable young girls put in her charge. Her motto is "Safety does not come first. Goodness, Truth and Beauty

do. "These words succeed in establishing that there is a subtle difference of approach and interpretation between Miss Brodie and the rest of the staff, and underlines the fact that she is at odds with them. As lessons proceed, Miss Brodie's dominant personality succeeds in making her pupils participate and share in the guilty secret of only pretending to do school work but actually listening to tales of her unfulfilled romance with Hugh Carruthers. The highly romanticised tale of a relationship nipped in the bud has some of her pupils regarding her in the light of a tragic heroine who, despite great personal odds, is struggling to transform them into the "creme de la creme of society" (p.6). By imbuing them with a sense of distinction and making them feel a cut above the rest, Miss Brodie manages to win the affection and loyalty of six girls who, for ever afterwards "were held in suspicion and not much liking for showing no signs of team spirit" and having "very little in common with each other outside their continuing friendship with Jean Brodie" (p.2).

Among them was Monica Douglas who was, in later life, well-known for her mathematical prowess and her quick anger; Rose Stanley who became "famous for sex" (p.3); Eunice Gardiner who was a spritely gymnast; Sandy Stranger who, with her exceptionally small eyes, came to be known for the clarity of her vowel sounds; the graceful Jenny Gray who became known for her histrionic capabilities; and Mary Macgregor "whose fame rested on her being a silent lump" (p.5) an insipid personality without any of the distinction that marked the others.

Once their confidence had been secured, Miss Brodie took to grooming them according to her insights. They were often invited for meals by her and then indoctrinated with principles that Miss Brodie held dear to her heart. Only with them she discussed the differences she had with her colleagues and the unsuccessful attempts that had been made to remove her from the school's staff. With these frequent reiterations of the difficulties she ran into while imparting education to them, Miss Brodie emerged as an admirable figure in the eyes of the young girls. Their sense of indebtedness intensified with Miss Brodie's constant reminders of how all else in her life was secondary as she had dedicated her "prime" to them. The result was that each of them not only started to idealize her but also endeavoured to protect her from the machinations of the headmistress, Miss Mackay, and the other mistresses. The Brodie "set" (p.1) was thus born and each member swore eternal allegiance to the woman who, they had good reason to believe, had sacrificed all to make them the "creme de la creme" from among their peers.

Though not very well informed about the subjects that formed their curriculum, the Brodie set had more knowledge than their peers about Mussolini, the Renaissance painters, skin-cleansing creams, menarche, Einstein, the love life of Charlotte Bronte and the rudiments of astrology. By the time they were sixteen and had reached the fourth form, they were each symbols of the non-conformity that was associated with Miss Brodie herself. To publicly publish and reiterate their individuality, each girl wore her school hat in a different manner and at a different angle.

2.3.2 Chapter 2

Much later in life, when Mary Macgregor was deserted by her boyfriend, a corporal, who did not turn up at a date, she remembered her school days as the happiest period of her life and relapsed into her usual bewildered state. She died, rather horrifically, at the age of twenty four, in a fire at Cumberland Hotel where her usual dullness led her to repeatedly run through smoke-choked corridors and bring on asphyxiation.

Sandy and Jenny also shared with her this sense of ecstatic happiness. Sex predominated the imagination of these two girls who started writing their clandestine literary venture called "The Mountain Eyrie". It was an imaginative saga of the great romance that Miss Brodie had with Hugh Carruthers, a soldier who died ironically just a few days before the Armistice. The story is laced with sexual innuendo which, the girls feel, sullies the the purity of the relationship. They declare that any of their liaisons in future would be free from sexual familiarity but at the same time, express a desire to closely see and inspect the nude figure of a Greek god in the local museum. They plan the trip with Miss Brodie, knowing that nudity could never bother her like the other grown-ups.

There is an account of Miss Brodie's poetry class in which she recites Tennyson's poem "The Lady of Shallot". Through it she wants her pupils to cultivate the art of "composure"

practiced by the lady and, which she feels, is "one of the best assets of a woman" (p.25). Jenny with her golden ringlets and sweet voice enraptured Mr. Lowther, the music teacher, who daringly twirled her curls and encouraged her to sing. Miss Brodie was always there during music lessons and never lost the opportunity to impress upon her pupils that how they were her "vocation", that she had dedicated her prime to them and would even turn down an offer of marriage from a titled man to ensure that they became the elite "creme-de-la-creme".

By 1931, Miss Brodie had selected her favourites and knew she could rely on them in moments of crisis when matters reached a head between her and the Headmistress. More than the Brodie set, Miss Brodie relied on their parents whom "she could trust not to lodge complaints about the more advanced and seditious aspects of her educational policy" (p.30). Her "special girls" were often invited to tea and taken into confidence about her feud with the Headmistress as they "learned what troubles in her career Miss Brodie encountered on their behalf" (p.30). She took them for walks around Edinburgh, especially the older parts of the city and it is through Sandy's memory and vision of one such occasion that one gets to understand that Miss Brodie "understood them as a body with herself for the head...in unified compliance to her destiny, as if God had willed them to birth for that purpose" (p.36). On passing a group of Girl Guides, Miss Brodie scorns them as she considers them a rival group whose sense of loyalty and duty might weaken and cause some of her group to forsake her. The walk exposes the Brodie set to the dismal realities of the poorest suburbs of Edinburgh. They see unshod children playing in the icy winds that sweep the city, witness a man battering his wife, encounter another ravaged by alcohol and unemployment, and all too early in their lives they come to know of harsh realities that their protective home environments tried hard to veil.

In the course of the conversation during the walk, Miss Brodie lets out that she is to have an encounter with Miss Mackay who questions her "methods of instruction" (p.45). She then proceeds to justify her method by defining education as coming from the root "e from *ex*, out, and *duco*, I lead. It means a leading out. To me education is a leading out of what is already there in a pupil's soul" (p.45). She feels that there is a radical difference between her principles of education and those of the other mistresses—"We differ at the root" (p.47). As long as her methods "can be proved to be in any part improper or subversive" (p.48) she does not feel threatened. At the same time, Miss Brodie is confident that her set, so carefully nurtured over months, will never let her down by betraying her to Miss Mackay, the headmistress.

Twenty-eight years later, after Miss Brodie's own death, Jenny, a nurse, tells her husband, a doctor, about the extraordinary hold that Miss Brodie exercised on her set and expresses a desire to lay flowers at her grave when they next visit Edinburgh. Jenny also speaks of Miss Brodie's betrayal to school authorities by one of the Brodie set and the niggling doubts that come to her mind regarding the identity of the betrayer.

Sandy Stranger, who took orders as a nun later in life, remembers how their walks opened the windows of her mind to "other people's Edinburgh, quite different from hers" (p.41), and on being asked about the biggest influence in her life, remembers it as "a Miss Jean Brodie in her prime". Sandy's perception of reality had been jolted by the walks and later, as Sister Helena of the Transfiguration, she had authored an odd psychological treatise on the nature of moral perception called "The Transfiguration of the Commonplace" (p.43). This work had helped Sister Helena earn intellectual eminence and greater freedom from the rigorous mores of the convent.

2.3.3 Chapter 3

Miss Brodie was not alone in her views or attitudes to life. "There were legions of her kind during the nineteen-thirties, women from the age of thirty and upward, who crowded their war-bereaved spinsterhood with voyages of discovery into new ideas and energetic practices in art or social welfare, education or religion....They were great talkers and feminists...who talked to men as man-to-man". (pp.52-54).

Miss Brodie herself was in "a state of fluctuating development" (p.54) and believed that there was nothing she could not learn in the years of her prime. "Little did she realise that the principles governing the end of her prime would have astonished herself at the beginning of it" (p.55).

Once, when Miss Brodie in her history class flitted from one digression to another, Miss Mackay made an unexpected entry to remind the girls of the qualifying examination that had to be passed before entering senior school. It caused Miss Brodie some anxious moments but as soon as the Headmistress left, she continued as if there had been no interruption, "Qualifying examination or no qualifying examination, you will have the benefit of my experiences in Italy" (p.57). She then proceeded to tell them about her admiration for Mussolini who had "performed feats of magnitude" by abolishing unemployment, talked about the Colosseum in Rome where gladiators fought and slaves were thrown to lions, of the nasal way in which Americans spoke, her brief encounter with an Italian poet and her admiration for Rossetti.

Miss Brodie's working environment was marked by a hostility and resentment that her colleagues felt towards her. There were, however, two exceptions to the general tide of feeling that flowed against her. These were two men—Gordon Lowther, the singing master, and Teddy Lloyd, the art master. Both were a little in love with Miss Brodie and were beginning to compete with each other for her affections. She was unaware of this angle and saw them as her supporters to whom she felt infinitely grateful. The Brodie set looked with greater interest upon Mr. Lloyd, who was better shaped and more sophisticated than Mr. Lowther. What added to his charm was the golden lock of hair that fell over his brow and the fact that he had only one arm, the other having been lost in the Great War.

Mr. Lloyd's practical analysis and appreciation of Botticelli's masterpiece 'Primavera', resulted in suppressed laughter heard around the class. Each time his pointer traced the nude outlines of the women in the painting, a collective sound of mirth could be heard around the room and aroused Miss Brodie's wrath. Mary, out of all the girls, was found giggling "like a dirty-minded child of an uncultured home" and Miss Brodie's retribution was swift. Mary was propelled out of the room and this violent action restored sobriety among the rest of the class.

Then came the news one day that after school Mr. Lloyd had kissed Miss Brodie in the art room. Monica Douglas reported it to the Brodie set as an eye-witness account and initially there was a reaction of disbelief among the girls. It was Sandy who closely questioned Monica about the details before accepting the veracity of the story. This incident, which occupied the Brodie set's imagination for many months to come, was kept a secret and shared only among her favoured students. It began to be noticed that a subtle change had overcome Miss Brodie who took to wearing new clothes and jewellery.

Then Miss Brodie was away from school for two weeks with an ailment and her leave coincided with Mr. Lowther's leave of absence for ostensibly the same reasons. This set tongues wagging and it was Miss Gaunt, temporarily replacing Miss Brodie in class, who slyly suggested a connection between the two. When Miss Brodie returned after her vacation, she played for and occasionally sang along with Mr. Lowther during practice for the annual concert. Sandy could not help deducing that a strange love triangle, involving Miss Brodie, Mr. Lloyd and Mr. Lowther, had come into existence. The irony of the situation was that the singing master loved Miss Brodie who, in turn, loved the drawing master. Despite Sandy's fertile imagination, it "was impossible to imagine her (Brodie) in a sexual context at all, and yet it was impossible not to suspect that such things were so" (p.49).

Jenny, walking alone, was one day accosted by a man in an isolated spot. He first caught her attention and then proceeded to expose his genitalia to the innocent girl. After the initial shock, Jenny escaped unpursued and unscathed and the matter was reported to the police. A policewoman even came to question Jenny. She mentioned this episode only to Sandy, her best friend. Sandy's curiosity, however, became obsessive and she made Jenny narrate her experience over and over again. She got a perverse pleasure out of the repetition of events and took to loathing the idea of sex after imagining what Jenny had gone through. This was a secret which only Jenny and Sandy shared; even Miss Brodie was not allowed to get a whiff of it. Gradually the man who accosted Jenny was forgotten and all that Sandy remembered and admired was the unknown policewoman who became a heroic figure in her eyes.

In this chapter the focus is on sexual interpretations of the simplest of things like the shuttles of sewing machines going up and down, and Sandy and Jenny completing a fictitious and highly romantic love correspondence between Miss Brodie and Mr. Lowther which ended in sexual intimacy but, as Miss Brodie was dedicated to her girls in her prime, she

declined marriage. She, however, admitted that her true affection was for Teddy Lloyd who "was married to another" (p.95).

Much later, when Miss Brodie had been forcibly retired and was terminally ill, she confessed to Sandy her feelings for Teddy Lloyd and how she camouflaged her affections by entering into a relationship with Mr. Lowther. She died believing that it was her personal life which made one of her favoured pupils betray her to the authorities.

2.3.4 Chapter 4

The Brodie set are now in senior school and Miss Brodie is no longer the deity presiding over them. The senior school teachers are immersed in their fields of specialisation and show no interest in the personalities of their pupils. The most fascinating place is the science room where lessons are called "experiments" and the girls have the sneaking suspicion that even the teacher, Miss Lockhart, does not know the result of these experiments. This sense of sinister suspense that marks the science classes comes to the fore when Mary Macgregor takes fright during an experiment that involves magnesium flares and runs panic-stricken between benches, only to be met by tongues of flame wherever she goes. It takes Miss Lockhart, the science mistress, quite some time and patience to calm down the petrified girl.

Miss Mackay, the Headmistress, was particularly pleased that, in senior school, the Brodie set did not have Miss Brodie around any more to give them directions. She laid a scheme to finally disperse this group and rid the school of Miss Brodie. She started by allowing the dull Mary to take Latin as a subject and hoped that this favour would induce the girl to reveal some unsavoury yet concrete evidence of Miss Brodie's personal life about which Miss Mackay had only vague suspicions. Mary, however, was too dumb to understand her probing questions; in fact she did not take them to be questions at all. For her they were statements which she accepted meekly. Miss Mackay's plot had backfired.

Even the system of dividing the senior girls into "houses", or groups for extra-curricular activities and competitions, did not arouse a sense of team spirit within the Brodie set. The girls still maintained their loyalty to Miss Brodie and kept her well-informed about all that happened in class. Miss Brodie, on the other hand, related to them the domestic crisis that Mr Lowther, the music teacher, was going through. His housekeeper had deserted him and the Misses Ellen and Allison Kerr, the junior school sewing mistresses, had taken on the temporary task of running Mr. Lowther's household. Miss Brodie looked on those two women with suspicion as she found them too vapid and liable to be easily dominated by the likes of the formidable Miss Gaunt. The latter, in fact, encouraged the Kerrs to make this arrangement with Mr. Lowther a permanent one so that a stern eye could be kept on the singing master's private life.

Though Miss Brodie was concerned about her girls becoming attached to senior school mistresses, she never voiced these concerns before them. Miss Brodie's pattern of life was well set now. Every Sunday would be spent at Mr. Lowther's house, and more often than not, even the night. Her heart was with Mr. Lloyd, the art teacher, but she gave herself to the singing master on the rebound, out of a sense of duty and martyrdom. She knew she could never openly flaunt her affection for the married Mr. Lloyd as this sort of a relationship would be frowned upon severely by society. She lost weight but her true passion remained hidden from prying eyes.

Then came a time when Miss Brodie perceived a similar loss of weight in Mr. Lowther and decided that the Kerrs were not doing their job. She could not allow them to continue in their domestic capacity at Mr. Lowther's if they could not feed him properly. She justified their dismissal by claiming descent from Will Brodie, "a man of substance, a cabinet maker and designer of gibbets, a member of the Town Council of Edinburgh and a keeper of two mistresses who bore him five children between them", who was caught stealing not for money but "for the danger in it", and who "died cheerfully on a gibbet of his own devising in seventeen-eighty-eight" (p.117). The now forty-three year old Miss Brodie cast social niceties to the winds and moved in with Mr. Lowther. To her girls, though, she gave the impression that she went back to her own lodgings each night.

The Brodie set came to visit her there each weekend, two at a time. After exchanging news, Miss Brodie would show a subtle interest in the preoccupations of Mr Lloyd and

Sandy, having divined the true nature of her affections, would relate news about him. It was she who described the warm unconventional atmosphere in his house, his six children, his Roman Catholic faith, his wife Deidre, and gave the surprising news that Rose Stanley modelled for his portraits. All the girls, when they visited, would vouch for information about Mr. Lloyd and when the summer holidays came Miss Brodie informed them of her decision to go to Germany, rather than Italy, and leave Mr. Lowther, for the period, in the hands of the Misses Kerr once again.

2.3.5 Chapter 5

Miss Brodie's passion for Mr. Lloyd is not one-sided. His response and reaction to her is conveyed through his art. No matter who the model and what the scene, Lloyd's portraits have a peculiar propensity—they all portray Miss Brodie whose features he is able to transpose on the face of anyone who might actually sit for him. Sandy, with her keen insight, can perceive the transference of Lloyd's hidden affection for Miss Brodie to his creative works. When told by Mr. Lloyd that he intended to paint the entire Brodie set together, Sandy remarks "We'd look like one big Miss Brodie, I suppose" (p. 136) and looks at him "with near-blackmailing insolence of her knowledge" (p. 136). Mr. Lloyd, understanding her meaning, kisses her passionately. Much later he embarks on a brief affair with Sandy, contravening Miss Brodie's plans for the future of Sandy and Rose. She had mistakenly imagined that she would preside over Mr. Lloyd's liaison with Rose and Sandy would serve as her informant on the affair. It turns out to be the other way round. From here begins her downfall that culminates in her betrayal.

Mr. Lowther, after two years of Miss Brodie's companionship, chooses to forsake her and marries Miss Lockhart, the science teacher. The news comes as a shock to Jean Brodie who, till then, was convinced that he would never be able to muster enough courage to push her out of his life. The irony of it is brought out with greater emphasis when the evening before the announcement of the engagement, Miss Brodie confidently tells Sandy "If I wished I could marry him tomorrow" (p. 157). Sandy understands that Lowther was the proxy through whom Miss Brodie satisfied her sexual yearnings and it is then that she sees the hypocrisy of the figure whose mores the Brodie set wrongly admired and tried to emulate all these many years. Though Miss Brodie contributed to the China tea set presented by the school staff to the couple, her demeanour at the presentation symbolised her sense of sadness and betrayal.

2.3.6 Chapter 6

Miss Brodie seems past her prime as far as her teaching goes. Miss Mackay, while talking to the Brodie set, voices her concern about the fate of Miss Brodie's class which she doubts will clear the qualifying examination for senior school. The Brodie set continue to admire Jean Brodie as an exciting woman whose personality still draws admiring looks from the now-married Mr. Lowther.

Miss Brodie takes a new girl, Joyce Emily Hammond, under her wing. Joyce Emily, a congenital rebel and troublemaker, has a history of school expulsions behind her. At Marcia Blaine, too, it is the duration of her stay more than anything else that evokes interest in her. When she disappears without a trace and enquiries are made about her absence from school, it is revealed that she had run away from home to fight in the Spanish Civil War but had been killed when the train in which she had been travelling had been attacked.

The Brodie set had, by now, developed "outside interests" (p. 156). Eunice practiced swimming and diving with a boyfriend. Monica and Mary had taken to community service and went to the slums with groceries. Jenny, discovering her dramatic talent, rehearsed incessantly for the school dramatic society. Rose continued to model for Mr. Lloyd and was occasionally accompanied there by Sandy.

Before finishing school, Mary became a shorthand typist and Jenny joined a school of dramatics. The four others finished school and then went their different ways. Eunice began to learn modern languages but finally became a nurse, Monica took science, Sandy preferred psychology and Rose, who was much sought after by boys, got married soon after.

Sandy's interest in psychology had to do with the chief preoccupation of her life at this stage. She had become highly interested in the painter's mind of Teddy Lloyd and the scheming

mind of Miss Brodie. The latter still revelled in knowing that Lloyd's portraits carried the unmistakable stamp of her appearance but was magnanimous enough to suggest to Sandy that she wanted Rose to take her (Brodie's) place in the artist's heart. It was with shocked surprise that she learnt of the reversal of roles that she had envisaged for Sandy and Rose. It was Sandy who had become Lloyd's lover and it was Rose who was her informant about it.

Sandy was driven by an obsession to understand Lloyd's mind. To do this, she had undertaken to understand his faith in Roman Catholicism. She "extracted his religion as a pith from a husk. Her mind was as full of his religion as a night sky is full of things visible and invisible. She left the man and took his religion and became a nun in the course of time" (p.165).

Soon after, Sandy learnt from Miss Brodie that the latter regretted having inspired the young Joyce Emily to go to Spain and join the Civil War on the side of General Franco. That Emily was killed before she could complete this mission compounded, in Sandy's eyes, the grim tragedy of the situation and brought about a complete reversal in the high regard that the girl had for Miss Brodie. Understanding that her teacher had overstepped the demands of objectivity and used her influence on an unsuspecting mind, Sandy determined that Miss Brodie no longer deserved to continue teaching at Marcia Blaine. She got down to the self-assigned task of having Miss Brodie dismissed from the school. Through Miss Mackay, the girl put her plan into action. In her perceptive and methodical way, Sandy was able to convince Miss Mackay that Miss Brodie could never be pinned down for her sexual indiscretions. She could, however, be hauled up for her political affiliations that were so clearly fascist.

When Miss Mackay expressed delight at the possibility of her finally ensnaring Miss Brodie, Sandy said she was only interested "in putting a stop to Miss Brodie" (p.167). Sandy achieved what she wanted. Miss Brodie was forced to retire in 1939 on the grounds that she had been teaching fascism. When occasionally invited by her former students, she would broach the circumstances of her retirement and then try to imagine the identity of her betrayer. Rejected and isolated, Miss Brodie died just after the Second World War, never knowing with certainty the true identity of her betrayer. Sandy, later to become Sister Helena, analyses Brodie's ultimate downfall as the consequence of her political ideology rather than a punishment for her unconventional love life.

In a conversation with Monica, Sister Helena reveals the true object of Miss Brodie's affection and how she never got sexual gratification in her concealed love for Teddy Lloyd. Jenny, during another conversation with Sister Helena, confesses that only Miss Brodie would understand the strange eroticism that filled her being on seeing a stranger in Rome. Eunice, after putting flowers on Miss Brodie's grave, reminisces about their teacher who had been betrayed and forcibly made to retire. Apart from Sandy, who understood and put a stop to the sinister machinations of Brodie, the rest of the Brodie set continued to admire their teacher much after her death.

While acknowledging that Miss Jean Brodie had been the main influence in her life, Sister Helena remarks that "it's only possible to betray where loyalty is due" and asserts that for Miss Brodie loyalty was due and justified "only up to a point" (p.170). Betrayal came when the teacher was seen by Sandy to have crossed this point.

2.4 LET US SUM UP

This is a fairly long Unit in which we get a bird's eye view of Spark's life, her works and a summarised version of the novel. These aspects combine to bring to the fore a number of issues that are discussed in the two Units that follow. You must remember that a summary is not a substitute for the original text, a reading of which is absolutely essential.

2.5 QUESTIONS

1. Comment on Spark's prolific diversity as a writer.
2. What arguments would you give in favour of the contention that Miss Brodie is a symbol of non-conformity?

3. What perspectives does the novel offer on education and art? Give illustrations from the text to support your arguments.

2.6 Suggested Reading

1. Muriel Spark, *Curriculum Vitae*, London : Constable, 1992.
2. Janet Todd (ed.), *Dictionary of British Women Writers*, London : Routledge, 1989.

UNIT 3 ANALYSING THE TEXT -1

Structure

- 3.0 Objectives
- 3.1 Muriel Spark's Narrative Technique
 - 3.1.1 The Brevity of Her Art
 - 3.1.2 Narrative-within-Narrative
 - 3.1.3 The Time Sequence
 - 3.1.4 The Plot
 - 3.1.5 Characterisation
- 3.2 Let Us Sum Up
- 3.3 Questions
- 3.4 Suggested Reading

3.0 OBJECTIVES

In this Unit we study different aspects of the author's technique of writing. We look at her style in terms of her treatment of plot and time sequence; we also assess her manner of characterisation.

3.1 SPARK'S NARRATIVE TECHNIQUE

Technical aspects of the narrative technique are the focus in this section.

3.1.1 The Brevity of Art

Muriel Spark is a writer who greatly values brevity in art. In her writings, therefore, she focuses on a small group of characters who have some shared interest. Though this tendency limits the plot as well as the activities of characters, it is ideal for bringing out "some kind of truth" that Spark believes must emerge out of fiction. In *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie* she portrays a group of six young school girls who interact in very close proximity with their teacher, Miss Brodie. The reader is subtly invited to assess Miss Brodie as a woman in her "prime", and as a person who endeavours to hone her favourite students into the "creme de la creme" of society. From the interaction of the girls with their teacher emerges the inexplicable and fatalistic hold that Miss Brodie exercises over the Brodie set. It is her tendency of swaying young impressionable minds to unethical ends that is put to a stop by one of the more perceptive of her students.

3.1.2 Narrative-within-Narrative

Within the main narrative, two of Miss Brodie's girls, Sandy and Jenny, create another narrative. Theirs is a fictional account of Miss Brodie's love-life and is written in the style of Walter Scott and R.L.Stevenson, whose works the girls have been reading. This pattern of narrative-within-narrative admirably conveys the psychology of young girls exposed to romantic fiction, ignorant and curious about sex and exulting in the melodramatic. First Sandy and Jenny together compile "The Mountain Eyrie", the story of Miss Brodie's jilted lover who holds these two authors to ransom in order to win back the affections of Jean Brodie. After some time they pool together their literary talents and complete a "love correspondence" between Miss Brodie and Mr. Lowther, the singing master. Sandy the more imaginative of the two, often imagines herself in romantic interludes in *Kidnapped* or in *Jane Eyre*.

3.1.3 The Time Sequence

Chronology and the time sequence are consciously rejected by the author. The omniscient narrator, knowing all about the past, present and future of the protagonists, deftly handles the time phases by practicing a kind of *flash forward* technique. This involves a mode of

narration that first describes how the protagonists shape up in their adulthood and the novel, at the very outset, describes how each of the Brodie girls turned out in the future.

Characters in the novel can be understood better if we perceive their future realities through the eyes of the novelist. Spark often resorts to presenting insightful flashes that not only look forward to the future but also help us in better comprehending the present in the novel. The narrative is interspersed with many an account in which the present is understood more clearly through events that materialised in the future.

At the very outset, Spark recounts the highly individualistic temperaments and tendencies of the Brodie set in Senior School. These sixteen year olds, studying in the fourth form, are characterised by attitudes of non-conformity. This trait is symbolised in their determination to wear their school hats in every manner but the proper one. Each of the six has her own area of interest and possesses individual qualities which are acknowledged in later life. Miss Brodie, on the other hand, represents and symbolises progressive education which is not confined to the classroom. She invariably shares her personal experiences with her favourite girls and often exposes them to life's realities by taking them for walks through sections of Edinburgh forbidden by parents or to museums and operas to appreciate art and culture.

It is, thus, made abundantly clear at the beginning that the novel deals with the theme of non-conformity, specifically the breaking away from the traditional methods of education. We, as readers, are prepared to view the Brodie set as a distinct unit, different from the other students, and Miss Brodie, their guide and mentor, as a fiercely independent and individualistic woman.

The denouement of the novel can be understood better if we look at it through the eyes of Sandy, one of the central figures in the story. She is sensitive and perceptive about people and situations and is able to sense, even as a very young girl, Miss Brodie's mesmeric hold over some of her students. Sandy also sees herself liberating them from their teacher's sinister machinations. Her courage, confidence and defiance are apparent when she is successfully able to negate Miss Brodie's carefully laid-out plans. It is she who becomes Mr Lloyd's lover and relegates the beautiful Rose to being a mere painter's model. Her betrayal of Miss Brodie is a vindication of her ability to assess situations and mete out justice.

The dull, clumsy and incompetent Mary Macgregor dies tragically in a hotel fire as she can only run from one end of a smoky corridor to another. Her helpless, vapid mind, which is always at a loss during crises, lets her down not only in death but also in life. At school, Mary can only scream helplessly while the rest of the class completes an experiment with magnesium flares. Her terror while others work symbolically foreshadows her death. We are able to understand Mary, the schoolgirl, better by encountering her first as an adult blindly retracing her steps in the corridor rather than opening nearby doors to seek escape. By creating a parallel situation in this manner, Spark is able to highlight the character of Mary as well as to create an extra dimension in the narrative texture.

The novel opens with the Brodie set as sixteen-year-olds, chatting self-consciously with some school boys. It then describes the special aptitudes of each of the girls before plunging back to their past, six years before, when they had first been put in the charge of Miss Brodie. From then on there is a constant flux in terms of the time sequence as the narrative flits between the protagonists' immediate past and their distant futures. By first presenting the future and then interconnecting it to the past, Muriel Spark gives us a clearer picture of character and situation, helping us to formulate our comprehension and response to the story.

Like most of Muriel Spark's works, this novel is written in the third person and focuses on the views held by the central figures, Miss Brodie and Sandy. Through them the author accentuates the contradictions and, later, the conflicts that arise when both perceive differently the role that a teacher should and does play in the moulding of pupils. Both represent different versions of similar experience and the unresolved conflict that results, gives the novel shades of the *nouveau roman*. Miss Brodie derives pleasure, power and boundless confidence from the fact that her favourite students were "hers for life" while Sandy revels in weakening and finally shattering the egocentricism of her teacher. This clash between their two divergent ideologies results in Sandy exposing Miss Brodie's fascistic tendencies to the Headmistress.

The plot revolves round a small group of characters comprising Miss Brodie, her special set of girls, Mr Lloyd, the art master, and Mr. Lowther, the singing teacher. The action within the novel is limited and restricted to the intermingling of these few characters. The central thematic concern, around which the action takes place, has to do with the identification of fraud and humbug that Miss Brodie exercises. We, as readers, are lured into the world of Marcia Blaine School which has one teacher, Miss Brodie, standing apart from the rest of the staff. It is the story of Miss Brodie and her brood that Muriel Spark chooses to describe. Out of all the girls in her class, Miss Brodie is shown to share special affinities with six of them. She grooms them in her own special way, which is radically different from the orthodox formal education imparted in the classroom. Miss Brodie has the unusual tendency of portraying herself in the role of a martyr who, despite the staff's hostility, has dedicated the best years of her life to the experiential enrichment of her students. By constantly harping upon her undeclared war with Miss Mackay, the Headmistress, over her unconventional methods of teaching, Miss Brodie wins the sympathy and the unwavering loyalty of her set. They look upon her as an unusual adult who delights in breaking conventions by describing to them her traumatic love-life, her sensitivity to art and music, her defiance of social norms and her glorious dreams of moulding their destinies in the future. As time passes, the girls build a protective halo around her and Miss Brodie exults in the knowledge that her girls will never let her down by reporting her bohemian lifestyle to the school authorities.

She does, however, practice a measure of caution when she falls in love with Mr.Lloyd. Though seen being kissed by him, she never acknowledges the true nature of her feelings for him till as long as her girls are in school. In fact, to camouflage her feelings, she takes to living with Mr.Lowther and faces the ignominy of him jilting her and marrying Miss Lockhart, the science teacher. Much later in life, when Miss Brodie had been forcibly retired and was terminally ill, did she acknowledge to the now adult Brodie set the true nature of her feelings for Mr.Lloyd.

Out of all her proteges, it is the ugly Sandy who is able to perceive hidden aspects of Miss Brodie's personality. It is she who looks through Mr.Lloyd's portraits and identifies striking similarities in all of them. No matter who the model, all his portraits end up in faces that bear a remarkable resemblance to Miss Brodie. This discovery reinforces her suspicions regarding the true nature of her teacher's affection and establishes the fraud and humbug that Miss Brodie indulges in. Sandy understands that all along, the Brodie set had been deceived into believing Miss Brodie's grand passion for Mr.Lowther and that it was Mr.Lloyd who really had her heart.

From then onwards, Sandy decides that she will not always fall in line with Miss Brodie's future plans regarding the girls. She begins by overturning Miss Brodie's cherished dreams of inducing Rose to be Mr.Lloyd's lover and Sandy, with her insight, to be her informant on the affair. As it turned out, it was Sandy who became the art master's lover and Rose who carried back the information about the affair. Sandy's interest in Miss Brodie's personality continues unabated after this. She begins to see Brodie in a negative light, as a being who equates herself with God and Providence and views herself as a deity that presides over the lives of others.

Shortly afterwards Miss Brodie mentions in passing that she regretted urging Joyce Emily, another of her students, to go and fight for General Franco in the Spanish Civil War. This conversation is the moment of revelation for Sandy as she realises that Miss Brodie is morally responsible for bringing about the death of Emily Joyce. By arousing the passion of revolutionary zeal in a young inexperienced schoolgirl, Miss Brodie had, as usual, allowed her ideology to overrule any pragmatism. She had encouraged Emily Joyce to join in a war but the young girl died in a train crash on the way to the battlefield. Sandy, on hearing this information decides that now Miss Brodie was too dangerous to be allowed to continue as a teacher moulding young minds.

Sandy is the only one who sees in Miss Brodie's revolutionary methods and ideology a deliberate attempt to legitimise the immoral and fraudulent. Determined to put a stop to this, Sandy betrays Miss Brodie by informing Miss Mackay about her fascination for fascism. In

an era where seeds were being planted for the second World War and Mussolini and Hitler were being perceived as essential evils, Sandy's charge sticks and Miss Brodie is forced to retire. Till the end of her life, Miss Brodie is left to ruminate over the identity of her betrayer whom she realises must be one of the Brodie set. Sandy, thus, completes her role as the agent who first perceives and then puts a stop to misleading propaganda wrought upon innocent minds. Miss Brodie's negative impulses and the abuse of power brings about her ultimate downfall.

Miss Brodie embodies the central concern of Murial Spark's early fiction which always takes up some form of conflict. In the novel it can be discerned in the tension between conventional doctrines and progressive methods of education. The resolution of the conflict emerges at the climax when a character's moral awakening helps him/her in evaluating the authenticity of the conflicting perspectives provided by the other characters.

3.1.5 Characterisation

As her early novels seek to portray psychological and moral growth, Spark's characters, we find, are interiorised. This means that they are involved in a search for a self that accommodates both personal fulfillment and political or social claims. These characters are usually guided by personal obsessions that turn their lives into channels of self-righteous imagination and bring about their destruction.

Miss Brodie is one such character. As an eccentric spinster and school teacher, she has made a fine art out of private judgement of character and specialises in organising the lives of the Brodie set according to her own insights. She negates and scoffs at any inculcation of the team spirit which, in her eyes, contravenes individual freedom. She thinks that as far as her proteges are concerned, she is "Providence" who can see their "beginning and end." Her indomitable personality resists all those who question her unorthodox methods. This impression of her power is also carried by her pupils who are unquestioning and uncritical, absorbing all that she says. In fact they go to the extent of being hostile to all who intrude in the classroom and seem to challenge the ways of Miss Brodie.

She derives her power from two sources. One emanates from those parents who could be trusted "not to lodge complaints about the more advanced and seditious aspects of her educational policy." The other was the personal equation that she shares with the Brodie set. Where their parents hesitated to take them, Miss Brodie was a willing escort. She initiated them into the world of art by telling them of the feats of Italian Renaissance painters. They learnt to appreciate not only operas but also understood the temperament of devoted artists like Anna Pavlova and Sybil Thorndike. By inviting them for meals and walks, Miss Brodie inculcated in the girls a sense of indebtedness which she used to her advantage whenever there was a confrontation with school authorities. In moments of crisis, she counted on their moral support and her clique becomes her greatest source of self-protection.

The devastating aspect of Miss Brodie's hold over the girls is seen in her machinations and manipulations regarding the future of especially two girls—Rose and Sandy. She oversteps the limits when she is seen manipulating situations in order to make Rose Mr. Lloyd's lover. She identifies Rose's "instinct" as the quality that would particularly appeal to the art master. Then she tries to convince Sandy that, with her insight, Sandy would be the ideal informant on the Lloyd-Rose liaison. It is Sandy who refuses to oblige and thwarts the teacher's plan.

Miss Brodie's relationship with Mr. Lowther also cannot stand the test of time. It starts on a note of deceit and fraud as Mr. Lowther is only a smokescreen to camouflage Miss Brodie's passion for Mr. Lloyd. She has her girls believe that she is only interested in restoring him back to the pink of health after going through a domestic upheaval that began with the departure of his housekeeper and the continued inefficiency by her replacement, the Kerr sisters. She keeps Mr. Lowther on tenterhooks and then begins to treat him with indifference believing all the while that she could marry him whenever she pleased. And when he gets engaged to Miss Lockhart, the science mistress, there is a great sense of shock and humiliation.

Miss Brodie's ideology also lets her down at a time when war clouds are gathering over Europe for a second time. Her admiration for fascism's symbols like Mussolini and Hitler

strike a discordant and false note about her in people's minds. It is these beliefs that make it easy for Sandy to betray her.

Miss Brodie's own fascistic leanings can be seen in her endeavour to cultivate and thrust her own passions on the minds of her special girls. She looks upon the Girl Guides as a rival group out to disband the Brodie set and makes clear her dislike and suspicion of them. She fails to understand that she is indulging herself at the expense of the freedom of others. She commits the error of playing God, assuming that everyone she chooses will fall under her control. This is the threatening aspect of her personality which sums up her abuse of power. Ultimately she is reduced to a pathetic creature who loses her power and cannot understand why those very individuals whom she had nurtured so carefully, let her down. She herself becomes the most damaged victim of her misplaced confidence. The pathos of her downfall and the importance of her defeat is conveyed through a description of her sitting "shrivelled and betrayed in her long preserved dark musquash coat and her blind groping for the real identity of her betrayer".

Another character who exhibits propensities of psychological and moral growth is Sandy. She, like, Miss Brodie, is involved in a search for self which leads her through many diverse experiences and culminates in her taking the vows of a nun. Sandy, is, however, the foil created by Spark to offset Brodie. She is seen to undertake a personal mission that initially questions, then defies, and ultimately betrays Miss Brodie for what she is. From the very outset, Sandy begins to investigate Miss Brodie's possible weak points and she relies on her experience, images and conscience to help her in this quest. From the very beginning she only tentatively assents to Miss Brodie's ideology and doctrine. She initially disrupts class by getting the dull Mary to give an incorrect answer; walks with her head bent back looking at the ceiling and telling Miss Brodie that she is imitating the great actress Sybil Thorndike; and deliberately chooses to stay away from Miss Brodie's tea party after a walk through the Edinburgh slums. All this is done to gauge Miss Brodie's reactions to subtle forms of defiance and Sandy is often told that one day she "will go too far" by exceeding the limits given by the teacher to her girls. With the passage of time, Sandy's experience of Miss Brodie's domination over the girls is supplemented by images that reinforce her opinion. When Jenny reports seeing Miss Brodie being kissed by Mr. Lloyd in the art room after school, Sandy begins to see the sexual aspect of Miss Brodie's love life. What until then had been confined to the romanticised tales that she and Jenny wrote, is confirmed in Sandy's mind. Proof of it comes later when she is the only one in the Brodie set who is able to identify the image of the teacher in any figure that Mr. Lloyd claims to paint. Sandy, thus, understands that Miss Brodie's passion and sexual yearning for the married art teacher could never be fulfilled. It was, as a result, transferred to Mr. Lowther with whom she only played a charade of love.

With Emily Joyce's tragic death while the girl was on the way to fight for General Franco in the Spanish Civil War, Sandy's conscience is jolted into action. Her tentative assent to Miss Brodie's doctrine is transformed to dissent. She reveals Brodie's fascist views to Miss Mackay and her action constitutes authorial agreement with the character's appraisal. Spark allies herself in some aspects with Sandy, who then enters a convent and publishes a psychological treatise called *The Transfiguration of The Commonplace*. Though Sandy is seen to have meted out justice, she herself is not a figure totally redeemed. In too many ways she bears an interior resemblance to Miss Brodie and we are made to see her anxieties as a nun. Her sense of personal guilt and revenge hound her, and are reflected in her picture as Sister Helena, clutching the bars of the convent enclosure and looking out at a world that seems to have passed her by.

At the fag end of their lives, both Miss Brodie and Sandy are figures of isolation. Miss Brodie is not burdened by the guilt of betrayal; she is only shaken by the knowledge that she has been betrayed and she dies never knowing the true reasons for her downfall. Sandy, as Sister Helena, lives and achieves fame but is always aware of cruelly betraying a woman to whom she could never recount the past. Both women simultaneously arouse our compassion and outrage. They stand out as figures who dared to defy conventions in personal and public life. Their weakness lies in them being unable to perceive and counter their destructive capabilities.

In contrast to the centrality of Miss Brodie and Sandy, the other characters are peripheral. They only serve to highlight the interaction between the two main protagonists. The girls in the Brodie set—Monica Douglas, Rose Stanley, Eunice Gardiner, Jenny Gray and Mary

Macgregor— symbolically emphasise the strength of Miss Brodie's personality. They are figures who represent flexibility and conformity to Miss Brodie's visions of them in the future. They do have resilience or the spirit to challenge her and remain her docile admirers even in adulthood. Like their mentor, they can only speculate about the identity of the person who betrayed Miss Brodie and brought about her embarrassing displacement from the school.

Mr.Lloyd the art master and Mr. Lowther, the singing teacher, are the only two males that we encounter directly in the text. They are shown to be the satellites of Miss Brodie who only serve to fulfill her emotional and physical needs. She begins by interacting with them as man-to-man. Her attitude, however, is not taken in the same light by them. They look upon her first as a woman and then as anything else. This naturally arouses a rivalry between them and it is to Mr.Lloyd that she is inclined. Being a married man, Mr.Lloyd can only indulge in clandestine meetings, one of which is witnessed by Sandy and Jenny. Till the end, Miss Brodie and Lloyd nurture their affection but are never open about it. It is only Sandy who perceives it in Mr.Lloyd's portraits and in Miss Brodie's questions whenever Sandy visits the Lloyd household. Mr.Lowther serves to camouflage Miss Brodie's true affection and slowly recedes out of Miss Brodie's life. In her personal life as well she is thwarted by social concerns. She can never publicly display her true affections which would be seen in an adulterous light. Her intimacy with Mr.Lowther is known but as there is never any material evidence, Miss Brodie only escapes with social censure.

Contrasted with the central figures, the other personalities seem insipid and uninspiring. They are deliberately portrayed in this manner to highlight the strength, and, thereby, the weaknesses of Miss Brodie and Sandy. This technique also serves to highlight the inherent clash of perceptions that builds up between the two. Spark's manner of characterisation is both witty and sardonic, and it conveys the author's capacity to observe and analyse different levels of human relationships.

3.2 LET US SUM UP

In this Unit we have discussed the technical aspects of Spark's novel. We notice how she successfully restricts the plot and introduces an unusual framework of time. We also read about the plot construction and her mode of characterisation.

3.3 QUESTIONS

1. Critically assess the technical proficiency of Muriel Spark with reference to her handling of the narrative-within-narrative, the mixing up of time sequence, versions of shared experience and brevity.
2. Write a note on how Spark conceives the plot in order to present the central concern of the novel.
3. The major characters in the novel reflect different aspects of moral and psychological growth. Illustrate with examples from the text.

3.4 SUGGESTED READING

1. Judy Sproxton, *The Women of Muriel Spark*, London : Constable, 1992.
2. Thomas F. Staley (ed.), *Twentieth Century Women Novelists*, Macmillan, 1992.
3. Robert E. Hosmer (ed.), *Contemporary British Women Writers: Texts and Strategies*, Macmillan, 1993.

UNIT 4 ANALYSING THE TEXT -2

Structure

- 4.0 Objectives
- 4.1 The Elements of Autobiography
- 4.2 Perspectives on Faith
- 4.3 The Issue of Morality
- 4.4 The Issue of Fascism
- 4.5 Let Us Sum Up
- 4.6 Questions
- 4.7 Suggested Reading

4.0 OBJECTIVES

This Unit is, in a sense, a continuation of the last one. It takes up for analysis some more issues that arise out of the text. These include the autobiographical aspects to be found within the novel; and we also look at the concepts of faith, morality and fascism that emerge so strongly within the text.

4.1 THE ELEMENTS OF AUTOBIOGRAPHY

In her autobiography *Curriculum Vitae*, Spark recounts her days at the James Gillespie High School for Girls in Edinburgh. She begins by describing how prosperous tradesmen from the sixteenth century onwards took a keen interest in founding schools in this city. They actually vied with each other in leaving behind their vast fortunes to these institutions, underlining the Scottish idea that education was a privilege to be denied to none. Her own school was established in 1797 by James Gillespie, a snuff merchant, who donated to it a considerable portion of his wealth. Spark acknowledges her debt to Gillespie whose endowments allowed people like her parents to pay moderate fees and yet receive, in return, educational services far beyond what they were paying for.

The author spent twelve years at the school and it is her experiences there that go into the writing of *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie*. The central figure of Miss Brodie in the novel is based on the personality of Miss Christina Kay, one of Spark's favourite teachers. The name Brodie, however, has been borrowed from a young American woman, Charlotte Brödie, who taught the author to read at the age of three. The fictional character has strong affinities with Miss Kay's exhilarating and impressive personality, yet there is a basic difference between the two.



James Gillespie's Girls School, Junior Class, 1930, Muriel Camberg (Spark), 3rd row, 2nd from right; Miss Christina Kay, Centre

Fascinating aspects of her personality are reflected in Miss Brodie. Miss Kay "entered" the author's imagination through gripping accounts of her travels through Europe and Egypt; her admiration for Italian painters like Leonardo Da Vinci, Botticelli, Giotto and Fra Lippo Lippi; her fascination for the cult of Mussolini's Fascisti; her dramatic method of instruction in which "shapes, sculptures, arithmetical problems, linguistic points moved easily around each other"; and her strong views on education which she believed was a "leading out" of what was there already rather than a "putting in".

The fictional Miss Brodie's ideas about education bear a remarkable similarity to the real Miss Kay's perceptions about the same subject. Miss Kay in the classroom constantly endeavoured to relate experience to education and Spark emphasises this not only in her autobiography but also in *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie* when she writes about how the Brodie set were "vastly informed on a lot of subjects irrelevant to the authorised curriculum".

Miss Kay's interdisciplinary approach is reflected not only in Miss Brodie's classroom methods but also in the attitudes that she is shown trying to build up among the Brodie set. Miss Kay ardently attended lectures at the university of Edinburgh and other institutions on such diverse subjects as theology, art, German poetry, health and beauty care, and most of what she absorbed, was shared with her class. In the novel, Miss Brodie follows a similar method. Miss Kay had a "knack of gaining our entire sympathy, whatever her views" writes Spark in *Curriculum Vitae* and she is successfully able to transpose this ability onto Miss Brodie. Within the novel, this particular knack is Miss Brodie's greatest strength and also her greatest weakness. Its positive impact is seen in the girls' diverse interests and individuality, but its sinister aspect is most strongly reflected in the circumstances of Emily Joyce's death. Miss Kay had taught her girls not to be carried away by "crowd- emotions" and this is reflected in the total lack of team spirit among the Brodie set. Along with her good friend, Frances Niven, Muriel Spark was one of Miss Kay's favourite students. Miss Kay often took these girls to the theatre, concerts, films, modern poetic plays and poetry reading sessions by prominent poets, paying for them out of her own pocket. All this was done, writes Spark in her autobiography, because "Miss Kay realised that our parents' interest in our welfare was only marginal cultural". Miss Brodie's attitude reflects the same concerns as she tries to weave her girls into the world of art and culture. Spark particularly recalls their visit to the Empire Theatre to see Anna Pavlova dancing in the ballet *"The Death of the Swan"* and her experience is reflected in the obsessive interest shown by Sandy in Pavlova, the temperamental artiste.

There are, however, very obvious differences between the real and the fictional character. Spark emphasises this in *Curriculum Vitae* :

In a sense Miss Kay was nothing like Miss Brodie...she was far far above and beyond her Brodie counterpart. If she could have met Miss Brodie, Miss Kay would have put the fictional character firmly in her place (p.81).

Miss Brodie's unconventional love-life in the novel did not in any way reflect aspects in Miss Kay's life. Spark makes this categorically clear in her autobiography but, at the same time, she gives her reasons for portraying Miss Brodie torn between Mr. Lloyd, the art master and Mr. Lowther, the singing master.

There would have been no question of a love-affair with the art master, or a sex-affair with the singing master, as in Miss Brodie's life. But children are quick to perceive possibilities, potentialities: in remark, perhaps in some remote context; in a glance, a smile. No, Miss Kay was not literally Miss Brodie, but I think Miss Kay had it in her, unrealised, to be the character I invented.

Spark only saw in Miss Kay latent potentialities of sexual love which she then made so obviously clear in the fictional personality of Miss Brodie. Miss Kay was about fifty years old in 1929 when she taught Spark and the author suggests there had been a man in her teacher's earlier life. The terrible carnage of the war had claimed him and Miss Kay "was of the generation of clever, academically trained women who had lost their sweethearts in the 1914-1918 war". Spark gives her teacher one of the first accolades by quoting John Steinbeck's tribute to great teachers—"a great teacher is a great artist.. Teaching might even be the greatest of the arts since the

medium is the human mind and spirit". By moulding the Brodie set's minds and spirits, the author has succeeded in immortalising her own teacher.

Some other prominent characters within the novel are based on people that the author was acquainted with. Mr. Wishart, Spark's singing master, and Mr. Gordon, the history master, serve as the inspiration and models for the creation of Mr. Lowther. Mr. Lowther's playing with Jenny's curls reflects a trait that he shares with Mr. Gordon, who indulged in a similar practice in class by stroking the young Spark's hair. The author's handsome art master, Arthur Couling, finds his fictional counterpart in Mr. Lloyd. In class, Mr. Couling had smashed a saucer to the ground in order to stop the girls chattering in class and in the novel, Mr. Lloyd is shown resorting to this in order to draw the girls' attention to the subject under discussion.

Spark learnt about the rudiments of sex through her brief friendship with Daphne Porter and the longlasting one with Francis Niven. In the novel, it is in the Sandy-Jenny association that this is reflected. The close rapport of the fictional characters reveals the exceptionally warm friendship that Spark shared with Frances. Their holiday at Crail, a seaside resort, where they completed and buried a jointly written story, is incorporated into the novel when Sandy and Jenny complete an imaginative account of one of Miss Brodie's liaisons and then bury this literary venture in a sandy cave.

The Edinburgh of the 1930s is sketched with sensitivity. When Miss Brodie takes her girls for walks through the city, they are exposed to the harsher realities of life which lie beyond their protective secure homes. The economic depression of the times are reflected in the slums of Old Town, with its long lines of unemployed people waiting for their dole, the rampant alcoholism, the violence and the general air of poverty reflected in the unshod children playing in the cold winds. More than any of the others it is Sandy who sees and responds to these realities that lie outside the ambit of middle-class existence. In later life, she acknowledges the horror she experienced at the squalor she saw on that occasion when she stood before an Edinburgh she had not seen before. As a young girl she had sought escape from the unpleasant experience by going home but later, as a nun, she could respond sensitively to others who came from these impoverished backgrounds.

In *Curriculum Vitae* Muriel Spark is able to recreate the atmosphere and the people she interacted with, especially those at the James Gillespie High School for Girls. After reading her autobiography we can say that much of *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie* is a fictional account of teachers and friends of Spark's childhood. The sense of nostalgia and indebtedness that characters express in the novel is also reiterated in her autobiography where Spark talks about the intelligent men and women who taught her in the prime of their lives and gave her "the benefit of a parallel home life".

4.2 PERSPECTIVES ON FAITH

Politics faded from fiction written during and after the first World War. It was replaced by a greater concentration on some religious and moral issues. *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie* touches upon both and in Miss Brodie and Sandy are reflected diverse threads of Christianity. The teacher's attitude is related to Calvinism while the student's ideology is steeped in Roman Catholicism. To understand these divergent beliefs we shall look briefly at the doctrines expounded by Martin Luther, John Calvin and John Knox and understand how their views differ from the doctrines of the Roman Catholic Church.

According to ancient tradition, St. Peter, the chief apostle of Christ founded the Christian Church at Rome. The Bishops of Rome since then have claimed for their office a direct succession from St. Peter and have come to be called Popes. The Pope is the head of the Roman Catholic Church and he resides in the Vatican City in Rome. The Church believes that in matters of faith and morals, the teachings of the church are infallible. This means that they are free from all possibility of error. It thereby follows that when the Pope, speaking in his apostolic capacity, makes a pronouncement in matters of faith and morals, his teaching is also infallible.

The Reformation or birth of Protestantism mark the breakaway from the Roman Catholic Church. This took place in Europe during the sixteenth century. It began in Germany where Martin Luther, a miner's son who had become a priest, preached against the granting of

indulgences by the Pope. Indulgences are pardons given in exchange for money. He drew attention by nailing a protest to the Church door in Wittenberg. He was condemned as a heretic and excommunicated by the Church in Rome. Luther realised he could not reform the existing Catholic Church and he formulated, in the Augsburg Confession of 1530, the basis of a new doctrine that broke away from Roman Catholicism. In England the Reformation started when Henry VIII, in 1534, threw off the authority of the Pope and declared himself Head of the Church. The Reformation became firmly established in England during the reign of Elizabeth I.

John Calvin was a Swiss religious reformer who was greatly influenced by Luther's doctrines. One of the controversial aspects of his teaching was the code of simplicity and austerity which he urged people to follow in both everyday life and church ritual. Calvinism denies the individual free will and sees all events as predestined or predetermined.

John Knox, a Scottish reformer and preacher, furthered the Calvinistic form of Protestantism. His triumph was achieved in 1560 when, by the Treaty of Edinburgh, Papal authority was abolished in Scotland and replaced by the Calvinistic confession of faith drawn up by Knox and his colleagues.

Miss Brodie's religious leanings are distinctly Calvinistic. There is her disapproval of the Church of Rome which she considers to be the "church of superstition" and believes that "only people who did not think for themselves were Roman Catholics". As a thinking individual she distances herself from the Roman Catholic Church and becomes, as Sandy says, "the God of Calvin...who sees the beginning and the end". Imbued with this sense of omnipotence, she sets about ordering her own life and also that of others. Her total lack of guilt in assuming this blurs her moral perceptions. "She was not," writes Spark, "in any doubt, she let everyone know she was in no doubt, that God was on her side whatever her course and so she experienced no difficulty or sense of hypocrisy in worship while at the same time she went to bed with the singing master". The sense of isolation and alienation that she encountered at the end of her life was brought on by a weakened sense of morality which she continues to justify for too long in her life.

Miss Brodie's attitudes to education are also related to Calvinism. She is like Calvin's God, holding sway over the Brodie set and expecting each of them to fulfil her expectations at each step of their lives. She begins in an incongruous manner by adopting a psychological approach. To her students she portrays herself as a victim of the system that thwarts her high ideals by questioning the methods of her teaching. She then seeks to assure them of an "academic" salvation by promising to turn them into the "creme de la creme" among their peers if only they would follow her advice in letter and spirit. Once, having gained the confidence of her six girls, she sets about planning and organising their futures for them. She especially undertakes to run the lives of Rose and Sandy in whom she sees the potential of fulfilling her personal dreams. "It was plain," writes Spark in the novel, "that Miss Brodie wanted Rose with her instinct to start preparing to be Teddy Lloyd's lover, and Sandy with her insight to act as informant on the affair. It was to this end that Rose and Sandy had been chosen as the creme de la creme". Her dreams, however, are rudely shattered when just the opposite happens.

Miss Brodie lives by personal insight and experience rather than by any theory and doctrine and Spark suggests that the Catholic Church was a suitable channel for normalising her. If Miss Brodie had lived within the parameters of doctrine and community, she might have avoided the pitfalls of personal judgement. Her vital personal energy could have been channelised in better directions rather than in planting explosive ideas in the minds of her naive followers. When Sandy perceives the devastating effect of Miss Brodie's imposition of personal ideology and enthusiasm, she understands the suffocating potential of her teacher. She is alarmed by the images on Lloyd's canvases where all girls resemble Miss Brodie, and is especially perturbed to hear of the circumstances of Emily Joyce's death. Sandy senses that Miss Brodie "has elected herself to grace" and saw her as a symbol of power that ruled the lives of lesser beings. Miss Brodie's self-righteousness and lack of humility irritate Sandy who sees "an excessive lack of guilt" in her teacher. In later years, when Sandy read John Calvin, she found it hard to reconcile to his doctrine in which the human soul was blindly enslaved to sin and gave people "an enormous sense of joy and salvation" so that "their surprise at the end might be nastier". Calvinism's deterministic streak is rejected by Sandy in favour of the more redemptive Roman Catholicism. She visualises Miss Brodie as a Calvinistic presence designing and determining the future of innocent minds and vows to put

a stop to it. She achieves this end but at the cost of personal guilt that flays her constantly and makes her uneasy as a nun. The author's sympathies, however, lie with Sandy. When Sandy recovers from her place of moral righteousness and looks back, she realises that Miss Brodie's defective sense of self-righteousness had not been without its beneficent and enlarging aspects.

Like Sandy, Muriel Spark personally rejects the determinism of Calvin and Knox in favour of the inclusiveness that she finds in orthodox Catholicism. Spark values seeing the truth and that too without sentimentality. In *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie*, humbug and falsehood become targets of her denunciation.

4.3 THE ISSUE OF MORALITY

Moral disturbance and degeneracy characterise Spark's vision in the novel. Moral disarray is conveyed through the presentation of Miss Brodie. She tries to wield moral or psychological power and control over the destinies of others but her religious sensibility fails to provide her with a clear moral perspective. By believing that "God was on her side", Brodie gives herself a false metaphysical aura and justifies the excesses in her life. Her success lies in influencing her girls to such an extent that she begins to see her actions lying "outside the context of right and wrong" and her blurred moral perspectives are thus transferred to the girls. It takes the sensitivity of Sandy to expose us to the dangerously destructive aspect of her psychological power over people.

At one point the author intervenes openly to state that only the Roman Catholic Church could accommodate Miss Brodie's extreme temperament. "It could have embraced, even while it disciplined, her soaring and diving spirit, and it even "might have normalised her". Miss Brodie, however, is never freed from her illusion that her own judgement would provide her with an absolute truth and this belief epitomises her stunted ethical outlook. This narrowness of view is highlighted through the attitudes of Sandy and Jenny, who after being freed from her influence, understand and are overcome by the boundless possibilities of life. When Jenny is attracted by a man in Rome, "the concise happening filled her with astonishment whenever it came to mind in later days ... the sense of the hidden possibilities in all things". When Sandy becomes a Catholic, her mind is as "full of religion as a night sky is full of things visible and invisible". The girls' feelings not only negate Miss Brodie's egocentric ideas of herself but also emphasise the difference between Miss Brodie and Sandy. The latter emerges as the most imaginative and most moral of the Brodie set, repeatedly envisaging life around herself in terms of fiction and romance. Her literary pursuits in documenting Miss Brodie's love life is an illustration of this. Sandy is torn between ethics and imagination and resolves this internal conflict by giving weightage to ethics. Her moral leanings are further highlighted through her psychological treatise on the nature of moral perception called "The Transfiguration of the Commonplace."

Though seeming to represent diverse moral positions, Miss Brodie and Sandy are ironically, involved in a common pursuit—the personal transfiguration of the commonplace. Miss Brodie is involved in shaping the lives of her set while Sandy is preoccupied with art and imagination. Through these characters, Spark is involved not only in examining the relations between moral responsibility and the transforming imagination but is also reiterating the connections between art, freedom and destiny.

4.4 THE ISSUE OF FASCISM

Spark's scrutiny of moral concerns brings to the fore the struggle between good and evil. Evil is shown to be the attempt to take over human beings and we see it in Brodie's exercise of moral and psychological power. Sandy's imaginative way of thinking makes her perceive that the Brodie set was Miss Brodie's "fascisti ... all knit together for her need". She is able to understand why Miss Brodie disapproves of the Girl Guides who she imagines are a threat to her hold over the Brodie set. Brodie sees them as a rival fascisti whom she cannot tolerate. Sandy's perceptions do not result in aversion for Miss Brodie when she is young. This impression, however, remains in her subconscious and surfaces before her decision to betray her teacher.

Miss Brodie's concept of education is ostensibly "a leading out of what is already there in the pupil's soul" but she dominates the girls rather than responding to their innate gifts. The falsehood of her claims is revealed in their documented fantasies and in their minds which are filled with her preoccupations. She believes in enriching the lives of her students but, paradoxically, is resentful of their forming any attachment with other mistresses in school. This possessive attitude, along with her scorn for girls opting for the modern side (rather than the classical) in Senior School, show her in a negative light. Like Adolf Hitler's Minister of Propaganda, Goebbels, Miss Brodie fires the imagination rather than the intellect. She manages to mystify rather than inform. Her admiration for figures like Mussolini and Hitler further supplement her image as an ideologue of fascism. We cannot help comparing her to these men with whom she shares a sinisterly powerful influence. Her betrayal and defeat at the end, therefore, becomes inevitable. It symbolises the origin of evil within human beings, especially its inherent presence within civilised and educated people, and its close link with the individual will. The defeat of fascism and Miss Brodie go together, placing *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie* within the historical space that it seeks to portray.

4.5 LET US SUM UP

This Unit, along with the previous one, examines a number of issues that arise from the text. After going through both the Units, we are in a position to identify and appreciate the different issues that lie hidden within the narrative.

4.6 QUESTIONS

1. In what respects can *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie* be called an autobiographical novel?
2. Write a note on the perspectives that the novel offers on faith and morality.
3. Discuss how Miss Brodie symbolises Fascism in the novel.

4.7 SUGGESTED READING

1. James Acheson (ed.), *The British and Irish Novel since 1960*, New York : St. Martin's Press, 1991

UNIT 5 THE NOVEL: 1960s AND AFTER

Structure

- 5.0 Objectives
- 5.1 The Novel in the 1960s
- 5.2 The Novel in the 1970s
- 5.3 The Novel since the 1980s
- 5.4 Let Us Sum Up
- 5.5 Questions
- 5.6 Suggested Reading

5.0 OBJECTIVES

We have now come to the final unit in our course. A study of the nine novels prescribed has given us an overview of the development of the English novel. Let us now examine some of the recent developments in the novel as a genre, in this unit.

This unit provides a general introduction to the British novel and the novel written in English from the 1960s to the present day. It has been divided into three parts. The first deals with the development of the novel during the 1960s, the second with the 1970s, and the third part presents a view of the new novel since the 1980s. The last part also describes how fiction branched out in various directions during the last two decades of this century, giving the novel in the English language a truly international character.

By studying this Unit along with the first one, you get a comprehensive view of the major trends in modern British fiction and understand the variety it has acquired in the hands of its major practitioners.

5.1 THE NOVEL IN THE 1960s

The fast-changing socio-political, economic and cultural scenario during the 1960s led to a consequential decade of remarkable literary achievements. With the intensification of the Cold War between the two major super powers, America and the Soviet Union, Russia first sending man into space, the Americans landing on the moon, the rising nuclear threat, the Vietnam War, and the broadening of the Black Power and the women's movement, the face of reality and history was irrevocably altered. The "Swinging Sixties", as they are generally called, came to represent the international spirit of "new consciousness". The period was marked by generational and cultural rebellion and by unprecedented affluence. The breaking down of traditional concepts of ethics and morality, linear time, and book-based culture made way for a new mode of life. As a result, there emerged the culture of rock music and psychedelic colours, of radical theatre and alternative press, of liberal sex and off-beat social, cultural and political behaviour, and all these gradually acquired a new prominence. This marked the beginning of a "counter-culture" which contributed to the intensification of the postmodern trend. Under these circumstances, the medium, rather than the content, engrossed attention and the novel found its expression in a destabilised form. This question of form in literature and art attracted the critical attention of the artist, who was impelled to explore new styles of expression that suited the postmodern trends of life and art.

The impact of the changing world order may easily be identified in the literary output of the period. The philosophy of Structuralism and Deconstruction challenged the old modes of literary expression. Literature was now reduced to the problematics of language. Novelists, were no longer concerned with resolving the hiatus between language and experience. They were more concerned with the issue of writing itself and with locating the world into the text and the text into the world. The writer could not locate her/himself in the text as s/he was her/himself being written by language. With the new popularity of literary theory, the traditional concepts of plot, character and chronology, practiced till the 1950s, were rejected. The British novel came to make acquaintance with "meta-fiction" that involved the intermingling of style, form and tradition, the interaction between literature and other

subjects, and the new focus on the problematics of language. This was, however, different from the French preoccupation with the meanings of signs or the American concern for meanings in historical extremity. British fiction, being acutely responsive to apocalyptic changes, still remained somewhat close to liberal realism. Its concern for humanism and fictional characterisation could be marked in the writings of Angus Wilson, Doris Lessing, Muriel Spark, Anthony Burgess and Iris Murdoch, all of whom continued to write well into the 1960s. British fiction opened its doors and windows to new experiences and newer modes of expression.

Doris Lessing's *The Golden Notebook* (1969) and John Fowles' *The French Lieutenant's Woman* (1969) largely represent the British novel of the 1960s. The shift in stylistic mode was summed up by Lessing when she said that her novel "would walk through the way it is shaped". It put aside the parameters of the earlier narratives and made a new beginning with a complicated structure. The portrait of the woman painted as the central character broaches the issues of self and discourse, and the intermixing of historical, personal, political and aesthetic codes.

John Fowles established himself with his short novel, *The Collector* (1963), but made his real mark with *The French Lieutenant's Woman*. "This is a work which," Malcolm Bradbury pertinently remarks in *The Modern British Novel*, "reconstructs and deconstructs the Victorian novel, and by implication all that goes with its continuing presence: its ideas of character and society, historical progress and evolution, chronological narrative and god-like storytelling". As the narrative weaves through its complex moorings, the central character, Sarah Woodruff, creates her own wavelength of discourse. She dictates tough authorial parameters for Fowles to negotiate within the terms of past and present and the female predicament of old and new. Fowles exposed fiction to new artistic challenges as he manipulated for his benefit the disparate roles of a theorist, a historian and a deft manipulator of sources.

Both Lessing and Fowles, as self-conscious artists, address the question of canon formation. They do not drastically change the conventional; rather they retain the spirit of British continuity with the past. They stand at the intersection of the novel and the anti-novel and herald a new generation of writers, announcing the arrival of experimental fiction. Prominent among those who took to such writing are Christine Brooke-Rose, Ann Quinn, John Burger, Eva Fíges, Paul Scott, Angela Carter and Alan Sheridan. Brooke-Rose deserves a special mention, being a theory-oriented author. Her bold titles like *Out* (1964), *Such* (1966), *Between* (1968) and *Thru* (1975), represent a world of signs and interrelated complexities of the world and the text. She carried on her engagement with intertextuality and honed her art in *Textermination* (1991), a campus novel about the postmodern condition.

Another version of the postmodernist trend is to be found in the anti-novels of B.S. Johnson. He intersperses his text with typographical play, blank pages, and comic interruptions. His novels *Albert Angelo* (1964) and *The Unfortunate* (1969) thrive on chaos and disorder as they make bold experiments in form. This tradition of textualising chaos also finds expression in Eva Fíges and Alan Burns. This decade, characterised by its experimental writings, also produced writers like David Caute, John Berger, J.G. Ballard and Michael Moorcock.

A different view of modern British fiction emerges in the social novels of Angus Wilson—*Lake Call* (1964) and *No Laughing Matter* (1967). The latter relates the saga of a family from the first World War to the sixties, of "hire purchase hoovers and sleeping-frill salvation." In it Wilson presents the breaking patterns of society and the vacuity of existence in the modern day global village. This perspective is broadened further in *As If By Magic* (1973) when Wilson moves on to the Third world scenario and its subaltern images. He breaks, thereby, the provincial framework of the British novel.

One of the prolific novelists of this period, Iris Murdoch, is supposed to be writing yet another kind of novel defined by Robert Scholes as "fabulation". Her novels are more artistic, realistic and highly evocative. They are concerned with ideas and ideals and are reminiscent of the novels of manners, of romance, fantasy and historical roles. *A Severed Head* (1961), *An Unofficial Rose* (1961), *The Unicorn* (1963), *The Italian Girl* (1964), *The Red and the Green* (1965), *The Time of The Angels* (1966), *The Nice and The Good* (1968) and *Bruno's Dream* (1968) fall under this category. She continued writing into the seventies and drew parallels with Shakespearean theatre in her novels like *A Fairly Honourable Defeat*

(1970), *The Black Prince* (1973) and *The Sea, Sea* (1978). She turns rather philosophical in her novels written during the 1980s. In *The Philosopher's Pupil* (1983) and *The Message of the Planet* (1989), Murdoch affords a fresh look at established institutions of religion, philosophy and art. Her novels offer realistic studies on the darker questions of life rather than struggling with complex textual codes.

Spark's co-religionist, Anthony Burgess, who came upon the scene rather confidently with *The Clockwork Orange* and *The Wanting Seed*, continued writing fables of the future in a satiric vein. The questions of language and overpopulation engross his attention. He also comes close to the science fiction writers like Kingsley Amis and Doris Lessing. He developed a different perspective during the 1970s and the 1980s as questions of art engrossed his attention. *MF* (1971), *Earthly Powers* (1980), *The End of The World News* (1983) and *The Kingdom of the Wicked* (1985) bear testimony to his ability to encompass issues related to structuralism, history and sin. Burgess, as a postmodernist novelist, is known primarily for his linguistic and technical skill.

The British novel had by now taken several new directions. Wilson and Fowles perfected realism, Murdoch refined the art of characterisation, Spark made her mark in plot construction, and Burgess showed ways to handle language. Two new roads to be taken were those of "neo-documentary" and "fabulation". David Lodge identified this new trend though he himself started with the realistic novel in *The Picturegrass* (1960) and *Ginger, You're Barmy* (1962). He took on a playful form in *The British Museum is Falling Down* (1965) by dealing with the issue of contraception and parodying major novelists of the past. Being a critic, he also reflected upon the question of art and may best be taken as an experimental realist.

Margaret Drabble, Melvyn Bragg, Julian Mitchell, John Berger are some of the novelists still working in the realistic mode. Their writings show how deep the roots of realism have gone in British fiction. Their postmodernist tendencies are reflected in their resorting to experimentation and fantasy. The spirit of apocalyptic fantasy gets its expression in Angela Carter's *Shadow Dance* (1965) and her surreal work *The Magic Toyshop* (1967). All these novelists are self-conscious and this finds expression in their works. Elements of baroque and mimicry find expression in the new narratives of the 1960s. The writers are closely concerned with the question of discovering the truth and the characters play an important role in this regard.

5.2 THE NOVEL IN THE 1970s

British fiction loses its vitality in 1970s. It is not as virile as in the 1960s nor as ebullient as in the 1980s. Both stylistically and historically it is a "sagging" period when contrasted with the "Swinging Sixties". This is also the time when the novel in English rather than the British novel came to make its mark. Writers from the Commonwealth countries gained prominence. The founding of the Booker Prize in 1969 introduced the spirit of competition in the literary scene and literature became a marketplace commodity. The novel in English acquired a hybrid character and became more complex.

One outstanding name among these novelists is that of the Trinidadian novelist V.S. Naipaul. His part documentary and part fictional venture, *In A Free State* (1971), represents a multicultural scenario encompassing the US, Britain and Africa. Other novelists who distinguish themselves come from diverse backgrounds: South African writer Nadine Gordimer's *The Conservationist* (1974), Indian novelist Ruth Praver Jhabvala's *Heat and Dust* (1975) and Paul Scott's *Staying On* (1977) won the Booker Prize and brought forth yet another view of imperialism and multicultural reality. Fiction was now getting more varied. This variety was carried further by John Berger in *G* (1972), Nicholas Mosley in *Impossible Object* (1968) and David Storey in *Saville* (1976).

The fiction of the 1970s returned to "fictions of identity" where empire is created afresh. J.G. Farrell's *The Siege of Krishnapur* (1973) deals with the Indian Mutiny of 1857 while his other novel, *The Singapore Grip* (1978), deals with the Japanese invasion of Malaya. Paul Scott's "Raj Quartet", consisting of *The Jewel In the Crown* (1964), *The Day of the Scorpion* (1968), *The Tower of Silence* (1971), and *A Division of The Spoils* (1975), represents a different view of experience in India. His books have complex perspectives on history and express subjective viewpoints, against the Indian backdrop of 1942-47. This strain of writing

continued with greater force during the 1980s and 1990s. It is in this context that we may take into account the novels of the post-colonial experience. Remarkable novels in this respect are Ruth Praver Jhabvala's *Heat and Dust* (1975), Anita Desai's *Clear Light of Day* (1980), Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* (1981), and Vikram Seth's *A Suitable Boy* (1993) and more recently Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things* (1997).

Another view of history may be found in the novelist's perception of the European Cold War. Le Carre's *The Naive and the Sentimental Lover* (1971), *Tinker, Tailor, Soldier, Spy* (1974) and *The Honourable Schoolboy* (1977) consider the important questions of the British establishment and its identity. Le Carre's influence was, however, not limited to the domain of Cold War fiction as his novels may also be taken to be keen interpretations of the British psyche in turmoil. Darker pictures of contemporary history appear in the surreal works of J.G. Ballard's *Concrete Island* (1974) and Michael Moorcock's *The Condition of Muzak* (1977).

Another shade of writing in the 1970s may be seen in Margaret Drabble's *The Needle's Eye* (1972) where she takes up the question of moral decay. In *The Realms of God* (1975) she takes archaeology as a metaphor for understanding British society. In *The Ice Age* (1977) she again refers to the issue of social decay. Drabble's fiction is modelled upon the realistic fiction of the last century.

A.S. Byatt's *The Virgin in the Garden* (1978) is a clear improvement on her previous works in which she undertakes the ambitious project of writing a multilayered novel. Byatt continues to write even today and she has emerged as one of the most respected names in new British fiction.

Discovering new modes of perception came to be the most engaging concern of the new novelists. Maureen Duffy, and Angela Carter are some of the prominent writers who explored the feminist perspective and took recourse to magic realism. In *The Infernal Desire Machine of Dr. Hoffman* (1972) Carter revives fairytale machinery and erotic themes, and in *The Passion of New Eve* (1977) she becomes utopian in visualising a future America. Fantasy and fairy story creep into her work to give it a postmodernist stance. This may be seen again in *The Bloody Chamber* (1979) when she presents a bizarre world of clowns, animals, humans and mythic figures.

Beryl Bainbridge is another important writer in this regard. She dwells upon the elements of surprise and comic fantasy. She possesses the ability of making the strange familiar and the familiar strange, and successfully creates the atmosphere of make-belief. Feminist perspectives emerge in the writings of Penelope Fitzgerald, A.L. Barker, Susan Hill and Rose Tremain among other. Fay Weldon's *Down Among the Women* (1971) and *Female Friends* (1975) are radical representations of the feminist discourse which continues further in *Praxis* (1978), *Puffballs* (1980) and subsequent works.

In the mid-1970s, writers like Martin Amis and Ian McEwan showed their keen interest in the grotesque and the overtly fantastic. Amis in *The Rachel Papers* (1973) and McEwan in his collection of short stories *First Love, Last Rites* (1975) show their talent in handling these themes. Amis shocked further in *Dead Bodies* (1975) and created revealing portraits of those subjected to drugs and sex. Both these writers perceive the grotesque only through the normal pattern of life. Amis, in his novel, *Success* (1978) is engaged with the narcissistic self. In the grotesque and fantastic portrayals of Amis and McEwan, we have strains of satire and morality. McEwan's first novel *The Cement Garden* (1978) uses this technique and carries it to its extreme. In *The Comfort Of Strangers* he continues with this mode as he conceives an imaginary city. McEwan and Amis are two important practitioners of postmodernism in British fiction. Their works may be appreciated as grim records of the contemporary crises.

A review of British fiction during the 1970s shows that it has lost its vitality in comparison to other fictions. The two issues of *The New Review* and *Granta* magazines, published in 1978 and 1980 respectively, painted a rather uninteresting literary scenario. The assessment was that British fiction had turned parochial and it lacked readers. While the postmodernist experiment was acquiring newer grounds elsewhere, Britain was lagging behind. In fact, the very face of fiction was changing as such. A new crop of writers, born elsewhere but living in Britain, came to the forefront. With this phenomenon, British fiction acquired variety in viewpoints and styles and became "multicultural".

5.3 THE NOVEL SINCE THE 1980s

The English Novel:
1960s and after

After the "winter of discontent" following the oil crisis, international recession and the coming of Margaret Thatcher to power in the 1980s, Britain felt the need to forge ahead in social, economic, and cultural arenas. The moral, social, and personal codes of the 1950s, 1960s and the 1970s had to be replaced by new myths and money. The free market had come to stay, and literature was a commodity and the writer, a salesman of his/her wares.

The 1980s covers the period between Margaret Thatcher's election in 1979 to her exit from office in 1990. It was a period of consequential happenings everywhere in Europe as the world and worldview were changing very fast. The British novel in the 1980s was largely concerned with the prevailing state of the nation and the world around. Margaret Drabble's novels *The Middle Ground* (1980), *The Radical Way* (1987), *A Natural Curiosity* (1989) and *The Gates of Ivory* (1991) realistically portray this gloom. Similarly, the portrayal of a fragmented British society under "Mrs Torture" attracts the attention of Salman Rushdie in *The Satanic Verses* (1988). This continues further in Peter Ackroyd's *Hawkesmoore* (1985), Paul Bailey's *Gabriel's Lament* (1986), Michael Moorcock's *Mother London* (1988). These novels remind one of the gothic spirit and the Dickensian portrayal of society. Other novels that represent this world of moral decay and highly commercialised culture are Geoff Dyer's *The Colour of Memory* (1989), Justin Cartwright's *Look At It This Way* (1990), Ian Sinclair's *Downriver* (1991), Angela Carter's *Wise Children* and Jim Crace's *Arcadia* (1992).

Another fictional perspective may be seen in the novels that represent the end of empires. These include Barry Unsworth's novels like *Pascal's Island* (1980) which deals with the aftermath of the Ottoman empire, *Stone Virgin* (1985) which considers the fate of imperial Venice, *Sugar and Rum* (1988) which deals with the death of Liverpool as a commercial centre. This theme of lost empires also attracted the attention of William Trevor, Molly Keane and Isabel Colgate in their novels *The Silence in the Garden* (1988), *Good Behaviour* (1981) and *The Shooting Party* (1980) respectively.

Some extremely complex experiments were undertaken at this point of time. We have a pictographic novel, *A Humument* (1980), by painter Tom Phillips. This is based on W.H. Mallock's novel *A Human Document* published in the Victorian age. In *Nice Look* (1988) David Lodge went to Victorian England, as did A.S. Byatt in her novel *Possession: A Romance* (1990). A novel with a similar style was Lawrence Norfolk's *Lempriere's Dictionary* (1992) in which an eighteenth century dictionary project is hampered by strange circumstances and stranger characters. The question of fictional archaeology loomed large over the practitioners of fiction during and after the 1980s.

As style underwent drastic shifts, the geography of the new fiction also widened. Africa emerged in the fiction of William Boyd, South Africa in the novels of Christopher Hope, Arabia and Europe in the writings of Anita Brookner and Julian Barnes, and Arabia in the books of Hillary Mantel. Travel writing also came to the forefront with Bruce Chatwin, Paul Theroux, Colin Thubron and Jonathan Raban. Novelists of multicultural origins came to project richer and diverse versions of the complex human predicament. Salman Rushdie, Vikram Seth from India, Timothy Mo from Hong Kong, Kazuo Ishiguro from Japan, Ben Okri and Buchi Emecheta from Nigeria, and Caryl Phillips from St. Kitts in the Caribbean, composed this scenario of unprecedented variety. With their diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds, they enriched fiction in English and made it truly international.

5.4 LET US SUM UP

This Unit discusses the changed face of fiction in the last four decades of the twentieth century. It underlined the creative exploration of writers who enriched traditions and broke new ground, placing the novel at the intersection of moral, social and philosophical speculation.

5.5 QUESTIONS

1. How does realism get expression in British fiction of 1960s?

2. Attempt a note on the novel in the English language with special reference to the development during the last two decades of our century.

5.6 SUGGESTED READING

1. Malcolm Bradbury, *The Modern British Novel*, Penguin, 1993.
2. Alan Massie, *The Novel Today: A Critical Guide to the British Novel 1970-1989*. London : Longman, 1990.