FROM SPLIT SELF TO SELF UNIFIED: TRAVELLING TO THE HOLY LAND IN MURIEL SPARK'S NOVEL *THE MANDELBAUM GATE*

ANNA WALCZUK

Jagiellonian University, Kraków

Abstract: The Mandelbaum Gate *holds a special place among Muriel Spark's novels not only on account of its length and rather traditional narrative structure, but also for its autobiographic reverberations. The main female protagonist, Barbara Vaughan, who struggles with the question 'who am I?', is a Roman Catholic convert, torn between her Jewish and Christian parentage and trying to restore her personal integrity in the midst of epistemological chaos. The aim of the article is to demonstrate how the journey through the conflict-ridden Jerusalem assists the protagonist in arriving at her own integrated and reconciled self. The multicultural Holy Land, where the sacred and the profane exist side by side, and truth gets intertwined with lies, becomes a testing ground for Barbara's personal identity which is gradually being rescued from the traps of indefiniteness and excruciating rifts. Muriel Spark's quest for her own voice in fiction runs parallel to Barbara's journey towards her unified self. Hence the article also proposes to look upon* The Mandelbaum Gate *in terms of the novelist's coming to grips with her own formula of fiction, viewed as a literary mode of telling lies in order to reach truth.*

Keywords: *pilgrimage, multiculturalism, division, identity, novel*

1. Introduction

An account of a journey as the narrative formula for all kinds of epistemological quests is a strategy quite frequently employed in literary fiction. Travelling through a definite geographical area or across fantasy lands provides a useful framing in fiction for an exploration of the most intimate recesses either in the private life of the individual, or in the public life of the whole community. Hence, understandably, the journey in the novel has acquired a status of a rhetorical macro-figure and consequently it has become a metaphor for various processes of discovery that may take place at different existential levels: spiritual, mental, emotional, social, communal, or political. Examples range from Conrad's

moral quest in *Heart of Darkness* to C.S. Lewis's spiritual epiphanies in his interplanetary novels, *Out of the Silent Planet* and *Voyage to Venus*.

2. Traditional form at variance with Spark's general mode of writing

In the *The Mandelbaum Gate* (1965) Muriel Spark uses an account of a journey through the divided Holy Land as a narrative modus operandi for the epistemological quest combining different planes of life: spiritual, emotional, social and political.

In this respect *The Mandelbaum Gate* falls within a broad category of novels which make use of a popular and fairly traditional fictional discourse. Thus at first glance the novel appears least innovative among Spark's works of fiction and rather remote from the postmodernist code that she usually pursues. The considerable length of the narrative text is also untypical, for here Muriel Spark abandons her preferred compactness of structure and economy of expression.

Although the literary paradigm of travel fiction adopted for *The Mandelbaum Gate* is by no means unusual, the novel holds a special place in Muriel Spark's entire creative output and that is why it deserves more assiduous critical attention. Consequently, a closer look at it shows that in *The Mandelbaum Gate* the journey which is the framing device for the epistemological pursuit is not only inscribed into the imaginatively presented territory of the Holy Land, but it transcends it and runs through a much broader area of verbal discourse. As a result, the female protagonist's travel through the conflict-ridden Jerusalem is matched with a parallel movement of the authorial narrator, who seeks her own distinct voice in fiction across the expanse of words which constitute not only the representation of social life in the novel, but also the fabric of Sparkian narrative. Therefore, in *The Mandelbaum Gate*, the discovery of the personal self in the course of the pilgrimage is inextricably connected with the quest for an artistic identity of its author and creator. The connection is made explicit in the sermon of an insubordinate English priest-pilgrim who violates the formal regulation that forbids preaching during the Mass at the Holy Sepulchre and in his lengthy address points to the deep-seated link between an act of pilgrimage and a work of art:

> The act of pilgrimage is an instinct of mankind. It is an act of devotion which, like a work of art, is meaning enough in itself. (*MG*, 210)

3. The autobiographic component

It would be an exaggeration to claim that *The Mandelbaum Gate* is an autobiographic novel, or even that it belongs to the newly coined genre of 'life writing'. However, the parallels between Barbara Vaughan, the main protagonist of the novel, and Muriel Spark herself, are significant and too overt to be ignored. Both Muriel Spark and her fictitious creation, Barbara Vaughan, are Roman

Catholic converts, and that which they have in common is not only their formal, but also existential commitment to Roman Catholicism as a fixed frame of reference and a norm against which they measure all important facts of life. Significantly, in the novel Barbara Vaughan is presented as "the sort of person who somehow induced one to think in terms of religion if one thought about her at all" (*MG*, 73).

In her interviews and non-fiction writing, Muriel Spark often refers to the significance of her conversion to Catholicism for the shape of her private life and for the development of her career as a novelist. Kelleher (1976: 79) claims that for Muriel Spark Roman Catholicism "is much more than an item of biographical interest: it is a potent force which has profoundly affected the shape of her art". The close link between Muriel Spark's religious belief and her creative writing has been underscored in a great number of critical articles and books dealing with her work, among which Ruth Whittaker's study, *The Faith and Fiction of Muriel Spark*, can be counted as one of the most notable examples. Although many of her novels, especially the later ones, do not show any outstanding characteristics that would justify classifying them as so-called Catholic fiction, still Muriel Spark is frequently viewed as a Catholic writer, which is evident, for instance, in her inclusion in the book edited by J. Friedman (1970) and devoted to "some twentieth-century Catholic novelists". Spark herself strongly emphasises the connection between her acceptance of the Catholic religion and her writing fiction. In the interview with Sara Frankel she admits that:

> … finding my writing voice coincided with my becoming a Catholic. I think becoming a Catholic made me feel more confident, because it took care of a lot of problems. You know, it's a mater of when you're at sea you like to have a compass so you can know where the needle's pointing north, and then you can go on from there. That's what my conversion meant to me: *That*'s settled, that's where I depart from, that's the north, the norm, and I can go around from that point. (*Partisan Review* 1987: 445)

It is one of Sparkian personal paradoxes that, regardless of her formidable spirit of dissention, which can be viewed as a distinctive trait of her character, Muriel Spark in her works of fiction always stresses the need for a solid foundation in norms to build upon, or purposefully deviate from. That is why, in the same interview, she firmly reasserts:

> It's very important for me to have a point of departure, because in the modern world nobody has any fixed belief or fixed idea of anything, and in a world like that a fixed point is very important. And it's not that I took it on for convenience – it's that I can't *not* believe that there is this norm. What other norm could there be, for someone brought up in the Western world, really wanting something? Whether we like it or not, the Christian-Judaic tradition that grew up around the Mediterranean

> dictates what we think is good and evil, and defines all the absolutes that we hold to be important. (ibidem)

In her 1992 autobiography, *Curriculum Vitae*, Muriel Spark speaks of "the existential quality of [her] religious experience" (202). In *The Mandelbaum Game*, a parallel work with autobiographic overtones in the mode of fiction, Barbara Vaughan intensely experiences the same "existential quality of [her] religious experience" during her pilgrimage in the Holy Land. While Barbara's travel is presented by means of the narrative, Muriel Spark's journey of inward writerly exploration is executed through its fictional discourse.

The Mandelbaum Gate was published a decade after Muriel Spark's conversion and it is viewed as the fruit of her stay in Israel in 1961, when she was covering Eichmann trial for the British press. The choice of the frame of the pilgrimage for both, Barbara's journey and Spark's own quest in terms of fiction, is not accidental, because a pilgrimage to a holy place has always been connected with the pilgrim's attempt to restore the sense of the self and to see it in relation to the other, where the other, within the frame of a pilgrimage, invariably stands for the divine as well as for the human. Another important aspect of a pilgrimage concerns the fact that it involves not only attaining the set target but also, or even primarily, it is related to a process of healing. It should be emphasised that the fictitious Barbara's pilgrimage is not directly based on any analogous enterprise of the novelist – her creator. Jerusalem is obviously recognised by all Christians as the cradle of their religion, and that is the most apparent reason why Barbara, like Muriel Spark – the author of the novel, attaches great importance to travelling to the Holy City of her newly found Faith. However, the journey through the territory of the Holy Land divided between Israel and Jordan, and inhabited by Jews, Christians and Muslims, has a broader meaning than its immediately religious significance. It concerns another important analogy between the author of the novel and its fictitious protagonist: Muriel Spark's father was Jewish, and her mother was Presbyterian; Barbara Vaughan is a half-Jew by her mother, which according to the Jewish tradition is more important because it means being Jewish by law. Thus Barbara Vaughan shares with Muriel Spark the same cultural identity which is, on the one hand, rooted in joint Judeo-Christian tradition, but on the other hand, it is split between Jewish and Christian parenthood.

4. Query about identity

Having family roots in two different cultures and two religions is largely the reason why Barbara Vaughan is constantly bothered by the question "who am I" (*MG*, 23, 36), which reverberates through the narrative of *The Mandelbaum Gate*. The unequivocal answer is difficult to give, because, on the one hand, both sides of Barbara's family claim her for themselves, but on the other, they reject her on the grounds of her mixed origin. Though Barbara sometimes finds her split identity

excruciating, it does not prevent her from looking upon it with moderate detachment and benign humour:

> 'They [the Aaronsons, on the Jewish maternal side] wouldn't worry who I married, now,' Barbara said. 'They always knew I wasn't quite the right blood for them. Only half right. The other half was wrong.'[…] 'And the Vaughans [on the Gentile side],' said Barbara cheerfully, 'always knew I hadn't quite the right background. They felt I was too fond of the Aaronsons. My environment was half wrong.' (*MG*, 39)

Barbara's reflections are triggered by her conversation with her cousin Michael Aaronson, who has guessed her feelings for Harry Clegg and realises that if they get married "the family won't like it" (*MG*, 39). Despite the fact that Barbara seems to be reconciled to the idea that she is bound to have "the outcast status" (*MG*, 39), the question "who am I?" does not lose its poignancy and, in consequence, it urges Miss Vaughan to go on a pilgrimage through the Holy Land to the core of her religion and to her self-fulfilment in love and acceptance of the other. Barbara's difficulty in answering the question "who am I?" leads her to the self-reflexive answer "I am who I am", with clear biblical reverberations of God giving his name to the inquiring Moses (cf. Exodus 3:14). Unsurprisingly, Barbara sees such reply as perfectly fitting for the transcendent order of the divine, but at the same time she discards it as completely unacceptable in the terrestrial order of the humankind. The same query which bothers Barbara in the novel has its analogue in the life of Muriel Spark, who traces the origin of her autobiography, *Curriculum Vitae*, to a casual question which she was once asked, "who are you, darling?":

> I thought it a very good question, and still do. I resolved, all those years ago, to write an autobiography which would help to explain, to myself and others: Who am I. (*CV*, 14)

What Spark explains in her autobiography in the language of discursive prose, Barbara Vaughan finds out across a broad range of experience and sundry adventures presented in the narrative mould of the work of fiction.

In imaginative terms, the question "who am I?" is underscored by strategies of camouflage and dissimulation whereto Barbara is compelled to resort, because in Jordan, Jews or part-Jews arriving by way of Israel have not been welcome, and the possession of a certificate of baptism, no matter whether authentic or false, has made no difference. That is why Barbara travelling across the Holy Land and trying to piece together disparate elements of her life uses subterfuge and disguise, masquerading either as an Arab servant with her face veiled in public or as a Roman Catholic nun accompanied by her Arab male friend, dressed up as a Franciscan. Thus she follows the deviant epistemological path to resolve her fundamental ontological and existential dilemma. In this respect again, like in

many other similar situations, the character of fictitious Barbara bears a close resemblance to the author of the novel. For Muriel Spark frequently repeated that in her novels she tells lies in order to arrive at truth. In the 1963 interview with Frank Kermode, she confirms her interest in absolute truth, declaring concomitantly that lies in fiction can be used as a means of reaching truth and so, accordingly, they can be treated as an "imaginative extension of the truth" (*Partisan Review* 1963: 61–82). Interestingly, Frank Kermode (1967: 64) raises the same issue in his study, *The Sense of an Ending*, when he claims: "[Literary fictions] find out about the changing world on our behalf. […] [T]hey do this, for some of us, perhaps better than history, perhaps better than theology, largely because they are consciously false". Likewise, Irving Malin (1970: 97-98) stresses Muriel Spark's tendency to use false clues and arbitrary far-fetched associations, and argues that by employing such narrative strategy, Spark always teaches the reader something about the overall true "cosmic design" of things.

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Barbara's decision to make a pilgrimage to the Holy Land of her newly embraced religion coincides with another important moment in her life, which is her intended marriage with Harry Clegg, an archaeologist working at that time on the site of the Dead Sea excavations in Jordan. The private and religious motifs of Barbara's journey converge and get considerably reinforced by the fact that Harry is divorced and Barbara, as a Roman Catholic bound by the ecclesiastical law, must wait for the annulment of Harry's previous marriage - an indispensable condition she has to comply with, if she wants to become Clegg's wife and remain within the Church.

Both the private and religious reasons for travelling to the Holy Land and making the pilgrimage to the foremost sites of Christianity can be viewed in terms of Barbara's overriding quest for her true self, combined with the desire to restore it to its full potential. The latter motif is intrinsically connected with Barbara's growing realisation that restoring the true sense of herself entails the need to break free from false identities imposed upon her by other people, especially by her female friend Ricky, whose friendship Barbara gradually finds more and more enslaving. Here again Barbara's experience overlaps with the novelist's. Muriel Spark in her autobiographic essay, "My Conversion", written soon after her formal entrance into the Roman Catholic Church and, notably, published in 1961, the same year when she stayed in Israel covering the Eichmann trial, stresses the significance of her conversion for her novel writing, and insists on the necessity to put aside other people's voices so as to speak with one's own:

> I think there is a connection between my writing and my conversion, but I don't want to be too dogmatic about it. […] I find I speak far more with my own voice as a Catholic and I think I could prove it with my stuff. Nobody can deny I speak with my own voice as a writer now, whereas before my conversion I couldn't do it

> because I was never sure what I was, the ideas teemed but I couldn't sort them out, I was talking and writing with other people's voices all the time. (Spark 1961: 59–61)

The admission "I was never sure what I was" deserves special notice, for it points to the quest for one's true 'self', which is a common denominator of Muriel Spark the novelist and her imaginative creations, among which Barbara Vaughan and *The Mandelbaum Gate* are particularly noteworthy.

5. Convergence of the opposites

Barbara seeks existential integrity and harmony and that is the main reason why she embarks on a mental and spiritual journey projected in geographical terms, and located in the area of discord and division which call for reconciliation and unification. Jerusalem, as the pivotal Holy City of Sparkian narrative and the cornerstone of her protagonist's personal quest, represents not only the politically fractured block of Western civilisation, but also a cleavage in the very hub of life. However, paradoxically, the ever-present rupture irresistibly bespeaks the need for healing and a drive towards a reunion. Accordingly, the narrative of *The Mandelbaum Gate* makes it clear that Jordanian Jerusalem and Israeli Jerusalem all the time remain the same one city. Likewise, the Holy Land, apart from being an important religious target for pilgrimage, is simultaneously an anthropomorphic image of the main protagonist, who, no matter how torn she is between opposite and contradictory forces, never ceases to be one person, though desperately seeking to recover her own 'self' and restore the undermined sense of her true identity. This is succinctly expressed in the words of Barbara's friend, Freddy, who through his own restorative journey has come to ignore artificial barriers and divisions, even if they are sanctioned by blood and culture: "Jewish blood or Gentile blood, the point is it's hers" (*MG*, p. 196). Therefore in the portrayal of the character of Barbara, Muriel Spark offers what Joseph Hynes calls an oxymoronic vision. Here it refers to the restored self of the main protagonist, where the opposites converge holding a promise of a new unified personality:

> For the first time since her arrival in the Middle East she felt all of a piece; Gentile and Jewess, Vaughan and Aaronson; she had caught some of Freddy's madness, having recognized by his manner in the car, as they careered across Jerusalem, that he had regained some lost or forgotten element in his nature and was now, at last, for some reason, flowering in the full irrational norm of the stock she also derived from: unself-questioning hierarchists, anarchistic imperialists, blood-sporting zoophiles, sceptical believers – the whole paradoxical lark that had secured, among their bones, the same life for the dead generations of British Islanders. She had caught a bit of Freddy's madness and for the first time in this Holy Land, felt all of a piece, a Gentile Jewess, a private-judging Catholic, a shy adventuress. (*MG*, 173)

The passage well illustrates the extent to which Sparkian discourse in the novel is charged with the master figure of oxymoron. The oxymoronic vision establishes the principal vantage point for viewing Barbara in the novel: "unself-questioning hierarchists, anarchistic imperialists, blood-sporting zoophiles, sceptical believers [… and] a private-judging Catholic, a shy adventuress" are blended together to produce a new entity presided over by Barbara's feeling of being "all of a piece" which opens and closes the above-quoted excerpt of the narrative.

It is not only the Gentile and the Jew that intersect in Barbara's personal history. There are many more similar instances of contradictions and disparate elements overlapping; and they all presuppose a deep-rooted paradigm of unity wherein division appears only accidental. The territory which Barbara covers in her pilgrimage is holy as the sacred repository of human and historical worth, but it is also unholy as the living city full of animosities, teeming with intrigue, deceit, espionage and double dealings. The profane and the sacred spaces overlap in the Holy Land and as such they constitute the proper stage for human existential drama of a quest for a unified vision of life and of oneself. Pursuing the pilgrim's itinerary teaches Barbara that cracks have to be ignored or repaired, and gaps have to be spanned in order to find out that two opposite parts are in fact complementary.

Undoubtedly, various forms of division and split, both encountered in the outward world and experienced as the inward reality, present grave problems for Barbara and her companions. Nevertheless it should be emphasized that, in the novel, all forms of rift and discord are invariably treated in a humorous manner. The frequently hilarious and witty tone of voice in the narrative often reflects the narrator's amused consciousness of the paradoxical nature of existence, stretched between great human aspirations combined with high principles of belief and incompatibly low standards of people's ordinary conduct, as can be seen in the description of one of Jewish quarters in Jerusalem:

> Up there at the end of this orthodox street, it was said, the Orthodox Jews would gather on a Saturday morning, piously to stone the passing motor-cars, breakers of the Sabbath. And across the street, streamers stretched from building to building, bearing an injunction in Hebrew, French and English:
>
> DAUGHTERS OF ISRAEL, OBSERVE MODESTY
> IN THESE STREETS!
>
> This, Freddy assumed to be for the benefit of any tourist-woman who might, for some mad reason, wish to walk in this Orthodox Jewish quarter wearing shorts or a low-cut sun dress; the local women themselves needed no such warning, being clad and covered, one way or another, all over. (*MG*, 7)

The Orthodox Jews' strong public disapproval of anybody disturbing the Sabbath is rendered in the narrative in terms as their desire to "piously […] stone the passing motor-cars", which throws into sharp relief the clash between high experience of religious piety and low execution of the actual practice of devotion.

The similar effect of a clash is achieved through the incongruity between the content of the injunction concerning the appropriate clothes for women in the Jewish quarter and the potential addressees of that directive as well as the choice of the three languages: Hebrew, French and English, in which the request is worded for the benefit of "daughters of Israel".

6. Story of adventure and the element of fun

Barbara's pilgrimage is not only a journey of self-discovery but it is also an occasion to experience great mirth and delight in what gradually emerges as a fascinating adventure of life. Hence Barbara's entire journey and her unruly conduct in the course of it are primarily presented as an inexhaustible source of divertissement and joy for the protagonist. Without diminishing the danger and risk involved in Barbara's secret dealings in Jerusalem, the narrative brings fun to the foreground of her experience. That is why Barbara sees her escape from the convent not in terms of a pragmatic ploy, or else jeopardy involved, but in terms of pleasure.

Like Muriel Spark herself, Miss Vaughan- the pilgrim thinks about turning her adventure of self-discovery, entailing the reparation of the fissures in her life, into an amusing story. It is significant that, for Barbara, having fun is intrinsically connected with "making a good story of it" (*MG*, 173). Accordingly, she frequently refers to a potential for an entertaining story that can be found in each event: "It will make a lovely story to tell afterwards" (*MG*, 276), Barbara says to her friend when she declines any help from the British Embassy and stays in hiding while suffering from scarlet fever. In this respect Barbara prides herself on her mental affinity with the Vaughans, who had a rare gift of turning every unfavourable incident of their lives into a good and entertaining story.

During Barbara's pilgrimage, not only the actual lived adventure has the potential to remedy the split personality, but also turning the personal experience into a narrative promises the same effect of therapeutic joy. The escape from the convent is both factual, as a useful strategy, and figurative, as the liberation from the psychological confines that impair personal development. Therefore, in *The Mandelbaum Gate*, the order of truth in life and the order of narrative fiction naturally come together:

> It was not any escape from any real convent, it was an unidentified confinement of the soul she had escaped from; she knew it already and was able to indulge in her slight feeling of disappointment that they had not been caught. It was fun to get away but it would also have been fun to get caught and to have had to explain something, and for Freddy to have explained. It would have made a funny story to tell Harry later on. (*MG*, 174)

When Barbara eventually tells Harry the story of her adventurous journey in the Holy Land, he responds with a comment that oscillates between humour and gravity, and in point of fact strikes the note of a profound theological truth concerning transcendent joy, which borders on ecstasy and is unrelated to any happy occurrences or a common understanding of simple contentment.

> Tell me – suppose you'd been killed – what's the technical Catholic difference between a martyr and a jolly good sport? (*MG*, 277)

7. Truth articulated in the polyphony of voices

Even though at first sight *The Mandelbaum Gate* strikes the reader as a fairly traditional novel, it nonetheless represents a thick narrative comprising a number of subplots masterly intertwined with the central story line of the pilgrimage, and the portrayal of the main protagonist significantly reinforced by other characters supporting the plot. Hence Barbara's search for her unified 'self' not only gets inscribed into a number of complementary subplots but, more importantly, it is recounted through a polyphony of voices. Such narrative strategies sustain and buttress up the protagonist's own journey of discovery and healing. Some of the characters that provide backing for Barbara's journey, like the English preacher at the Holy Sepulchre whose words have an enormous impact upon her, or Saul Ephraim, her Israeli guide from the Hebrew University, are only incidentally encountered; others, like Joe Ramdez and his son Abdul and daughter Suzi, or Freddy Hamilton, a British diplomat who decides to shake off his regular life of law-abiding and obedience, become Barbara's close companions, or even accomplices, in her clandestine escapades in the Holy Land. Evidently, in Spark's handling, the narrative of the disjointed state of affairs cannot achieve proper structural unity, unless it is told in the plurality of voices which, paradoxically, are the surest guarantee of unison. Likewise, Barbara's unified self can be eventually restored, but only if its cleaved parts are brought together and treated simultaneously as separate and complementary.

It has to be strongly emphasised that in *The Mandelbaum Gate* the main protagonist's quest for the unified self is inextricably connected with the quest for truth, and the polyphony of voices in the narrative structure can be matched on the philosophical plane with the plurality of epistemological paths leading to the ethical quality of truth. Thus Barbara Vaughan's pilgrimage to find out her personal identity corroborates Muriel Spark's quest for the suitable formula of the novel as an imaginative medium for grasping truth. As already mentioned, Muriel Spark defines her objective in writing fiction as getting at truth by means of lies. In keeping with the novelist's creed, Barbara's pilgrimage towards her true, i.e. integrated self, leads through the lies of false appearance, disguise, misleading façades or conspiracy.

The borderline between reality and appearance gets blurred, and, no matter how unlikely it seems, truth lies somewhere in between, at the meeting point of what is and what is not. While travelling in the Holy Land, Barbara continually sees the intertwining of fraud and veracity in the holy places she visits and, consequently, she observes that "it's difficult to separate the apocryphal from the true in this part of the world. It always has been" (*MG*, p. 184). Barbara's two most conspicuous character traits, "a sense of fidelity in the observing of observable things" (*MG*, p. 18) and "the beautiful and dangerous gift of faith" (*MG*, p. 18), have to be reconciled just as the apocryphal reconciles the homely claims of reason and imagination with the impossible demands of faith. In the course of her pilgrimage, Barbara learns that facts, against their inherent factuality, are unbelievable by nature. She has an acute sense of the pointlessness of explaining her suspicious movements in the Holy Land to the authorities, when she listens to Abdul who "piled lies upon truth" (*MG*, 105).

> They will never believe a pilgrimage, a fever. Who goes on a pilgrimage like this? You went like a spy, and they'll arrest Suzi and take my father's house in Jericho, and his wives, if you tell the facts. And if you don't tell the facts there is trouble for you from your own government. Who believes all this hiding for a pilgrimage? (*MG*, 321–322)

The complex reality Barbara encounters is epitomised by the "orange groves" of Abdul, underscored in the title ("Abdul's Orange Groves") of chapter IV of *The Mandelbaum Gate*. The eponymous orange groves do not exist in any material reality, however, they symbolise all Abdul's longings and, in consequence, they become a significant idiom in his discourse referring to the life where lies intersect with truth, and dreams overlap facts.

It is a much telling feature of *The Mandelbaum Gate* that the quest for the true self is inextricably connected with contriving plots; and plotting has a multiple significance in the novel, for it combines Barbara's scheming during her exploits in the Holy Land with the novelist's impulse for the making of stories. The inclination to plotting and its urgency is yet another factor which hints at the close similarity between Barbara Vaughan, the fictitious character, and Muriel Spark, the author of the novel. Barbara's journey towards a reclaimed unity of her selfhood is paralleled by a similar movement towards personal and authorial integrity in Muriel Spark, which took place after her conversion and which is evidenced in her fiction and non-fiction prose. In this respect, Spark's first novel, *The Comforters*, published in 1957, is particularly noteworthy, for it adopts a clearly autobiographic vantage point to raise the issue of authorial freedom and creativity, and to investigate in imaginative terms the intricate relationship between the author and the fictional character. Almost ten years later, *The Mandelbaum Gate*, in realistic terms of a quasi-documentary, accomplishes a deep-structure merger of the author and the character, without simply making the character the author's *alter ego*.

8. Conclusion

Psychological studies demonstrate that there may be two ways of repairing the split self: one involves placing it in the context of interpersonal contacts within a community, the other proposes regarding the self in relation to an external frame of reference. Muriel Spark incorporates both in her novel: the split communities of the Holy Land and the organising frame of the journey-pilgrimage. Travelling across the conflict-ridden Holy Land becomes for Barbara a psychological and spiritual journey from her split self to the self unified; and she ends her pilgrimage with a strong sense of being cured from the cleavage in personal identity she has been experiencing before.

The Mandelbaum Gate, apart from being the narrative of personal self-discovery, is also the novelist's powerful statement couched in the idiom of fiction about the intriguing interplay between division and unity. The novel closes with a twist of authorial and universal irony when Muriel Spark makes the eponymous Mandelbaum Gate a borderline which does not separate but connects. The dividing Gate is the central image in the fictional landscape of Spark's Jerusalem; it is supposed to be a dumb guardian of division and a barrier that prevents communication. However, the Gate, which at first appears as a formidable obstacle to confront, eventually turns out to be a completely insignificant feature of one of the streets in Jerusalem:

> … hardly a gate at all, but a piece of street between Jerusalem and Jerusalem, flanked by two huts, and called by that name because a house at the other end once belonged to a Mr. Mandelbaum. (*MG*, 330)

The novel closes with this statement, and thus it concludes the narrative and the journey across the mental and geographical areas marked with cracks and ruptures, but incessantly seeking – and finding – unity.

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