

## Muriel Spark

Novelist, Stag Hunter, Poet, Essayist

Dame Muriel Spark was born in Edinburgh in 1918. 2018 is the centenary of her birth, with events taking place across the UK. In 2008 The Times ranked Muriel Spark as No.6 in its '50 Greatest British Writers since 1945'. In 2010 she was posthumously shortlisted for the Man Booker Prize of 1970 for *The Driver's Seat*.

On leaving school, she studied précis writing at Heriot Watt College while teaching in a private school, later finding employment as a personal secretary.

In 1937, she went to Southern Rhodesia to marry, returning to England in 1944 after her divorce. She then entered the Political Intelligence department of the British Foreign Office and worked on various forms of subtle propaganda.

Her first interest was in poetry, and after World War II she became General Secretary of the Poetry Society and Editor of *Poetry Review*. Her own *Collected Poems 1* was published in 1967. In 1951 she won a short story competition run by *The Observer* and from then on also wrote fiction. Her first novel, *The Comforters*, was published in 1957.

She published many novels, most notably *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie* (1961), which was made into a film for 20<sup>th</sup> Century Fox. Maggie Smith starred in the lead role, winning Best Actress at the 1970 Academy Awards and BAFTAs. It also screened at that year's Royal Command Performance. Two other novels, *The Driver's Seat* (1970) and *The Abbess of Crewe* (1974), were also made into films, starring Elizabeth Taylor and Glenda Jackson respectively, and three into productions for TV, one of which was *The Girls of Slender Means* (1963), a novel about being young and poor in wartime London. *The Ballad of Peckham Rye* (1960) was adapted for radio as a musical, winning the 1962 Prix Italia, and *Memento Mori*, as well as being made into a TV film and adapted for the stage, was broadcast by the BBC. Her play, *Doctors of Philosophy*, written in 1962, was staged in London at the Arts Theatre, and in Scandinavia, where it was produced by Ingmar Bergman.

Some of Dame Muriel Spark's novels focus on unusual crimes and turns of fate, most notably *Territorial Rights* (1979), about a crime of passion; *The Hothouse by the East River* (1973); and *Not to Disturb* (1971), set on the shores of Lake Geneva. Satire was also an important part of her work. *The Abbess of Crewe* (1974), for example, is a send up of the Nixon-Watergate scandal.

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She studied the lives and works of Mary Shelley, the Brontë sisters and John Masefield. Her earliest book, *Child of Light* (1951), was a critical biography of Mary Shelley, written to celebrate the centenary of her death. This was followed by biographies of Emily Brontë and John Masefield, and in 1993, *The Essence of the Brontës* was published, an anthology of her writings on the family.

Her own autobiography, *Curriculum Vitae*, was published in 1992 and her novel, *Aiding and Abetting*, was published in 2000. Also a writer of children's books and many short stories, *The Complete Short Stories* was published in 2001. Her last novel was *The Finishing School* (2004).

Dame Muriel Spark travelled widely, and lived in Italy until her death. She received several honorary degrees, some in Oxford and London, and many in Scotland, and was elected a Companion of Literature by the Royal Society of Literature and an Honorary Member of the Royal Society of Edinburgh. She was also an Honorary Member of the American Academy of Arts and Letters and Commandeur de l'Ordre des Arts et des Lettres. She was made a Dame of the British Empire in 1993.

Dame Muriel Spark died on 13<sup>th</sup> April 2006 in Florence, Tuscany.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

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Omnibus IV Constable, 1997  
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Omnibus III Constable, 1996  
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The Only Problem Bodley Head, 1984  
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Bang Bang You're Dead and Other Stories Granada, 1982  
Loitering with Intent Bodley Head, 1981  
Territorial Rights Macmillan, 1979  
The Takeover Macmillan, 1976  
The Abbess of Crewe Macmillan, 1974  
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The Mandelbaum Gate Macmillan, 1965  
The Girls of Slender Means Macmillan, 1963  
Doctors of Philosophy (play) Macmillan, 1962  
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The Bachelors Macmillan, 1960  
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The Go-Away Bird Macmillan, 1958  
Robinson Macmillan, 1958  
The Comforters Macmillan, 1957  
John Masefield Peter Nevill Ltd, 1953  
Emily Brontë: Her Life and Work Peter Owen, 1953  
Child of Light: A Reassessment of Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley Tower Bridge Publications, 1951

### PRIZES AND AWARDS

2005 WH Smith Literary Award (shortlist) *The Finishing School*  
2005 Man Booker International Prize (shortlist)  
2004 Saltire Society Scottish Book of the Year Award (shortlist) *All the Poems of Muriel Spark*  
2002 Boccaccio Prize for European Literature (Italy)  
2001 Champion Award (USA)  
1998 PEN International Gold Pen Award  
1996 Scottish Arts Council Book Award *Reality and Dreams*  
1993 DBE  
1992 Ingersoll Foundation T. S. Eliot Award (USA)  
1991 Sunday Times Award for Literary Excellence  
1987 Saltire Society Scottish Book of the Year Award *The Stories of Muriel Spark*  
1987 Prix du Meilleur Recueil de Nouvelles Etrangères (France) *Pan! Pan! tu es Morte*  
1966 James Tait Black Memorial Prize (for fiction) *The Mandelbaum Gate*  
1962 Prix Italia (Italy) *The Ballad of Peckham Rye*  
1951 Observer Short Story Prize ('The Seraph and the Zambesi')

