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A Single Woman's Place

A thesis presented in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of

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Abstract

This thesis is a study of selected novels by Anita Brookner and Muriel Spark. It explores the depiction of women as figures of resistance and insurgence in the novels Look At Me and Hotel du Lac by Anita Brookner, and in The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie and The Abbess of Crewe written by Muriel Spark. The study looks first at the way the role of the single woman is structured, and functions as a location of resistance and subversion. The specific characters are Frances Hinton in Look At Me, and Edith Hope in Hotel du Lac and Jean Brodie in The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie, and the Abbess Alexandra in The Abbess of Crewe. The second focus is to determine whether a transfigurative process is enacted, how, and upon what.

The women characters are the pivotal location for the transfigurative processes, and their characterisation reveals what is disclosed, and what is transfigured. The proposal is that those transfigurative processes subvert culturally constructed notions, or commonplaces, about how women may see, and be seen, in the social environments presented in the novels.

The transfiguration of these nominal commonplaces is revealed in Brookner's work through the processes of change, which are depicted as necessary for the key characters to undergo. Transfiguration abounds in Spark's work as her satire and parody mock all social norms.

Finally, this thesis looks specifically at the relation between the consolidated material from the process outlined above and two general strategic approaches to women's writing. The first strategy is the revisionist approach that proposes a re-writing of traditional texts as a method of challenging and subverting the hierarchical constraints found in those texts. The other strategy advocates the appropriation of dominant patriarchal models for women to use in writing about women, and supports effecting change from within those models.

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Tena koe, tena koutou hoki

mo o mahi manaaki, mahi awhina

i ahau, ara matou hoki.

Kia ora koe.

Kia ora koe.

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