

Copyright is owned by the Author of the thesis. Permission is given for a copy to be downloaded by an individual for the purpose of research and private study only. The thesis may not be reproduced elsewhere without the permission of the Author.

A Single Woman's Place

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

Master of Arts
In
English

at Massey University, Palmerston North,
New Zealand.

Gailene Paula Bishop

2001

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.

Acknowledgements

The decision to extend the postgraduate study of English to the Albany Campus in Auckland, and to offer subjects in block course mode on that campus, has been the most positive contribution to this thesis ever being contemplated, let alone completed. Every gratitude is extended to those responsible for ensuring the ongoing commitment of Massey University, and in particular the School of English and Media Studies, to providing methods for study that do not automatically exclude those people whose lives have so far dictated their exclusion from advanced study opportunities. The supervision of Doctor Doreen d'Cruz has been diligent and patient, the support of colleague Sara Frost has been totally invaluable as has been the help and efficiency of Massey University Library and their staff.

Tena koe, tena koutou hoki

mo o mahi manaaki, mahi awhina

i ahau, ara matou hoki.

Kia ora koe.

Kia ora koe.

Contents

<i>Title page</i>	<i>i</i>
<i>Abstract</i>	<i>ii</i>
<i>Acknowledgement</i>	<i>iii</i>
<i>Contents</i>	<i>v</i>

1 Introduction: The subversive Single Woman

The Transfigurative Idea	1
Common Ground	4
Singular Women	6
Transfiguration and commonplaces	8
A Feminist Focus	10
The Approach to Brookner	12
The Approach to Spark	15
Conclusion	19

2 An Authentic Image in the Novels of Anita Brookner

Look At Me

The plea to "look at me".	21
The deceits of self-perception	23
A blameless futility	27
Being written into the plot	30
Incalculable fallacies	32
Being written off	34
A rite of passage	39
A sparsity of choice	42

Hotel du Lac

The behaviour most becoming to a woman	44
A duplicitious impression	45
Calculated fallacies	50
A Re-defined Romance	55
The problems of love	58

3 Transfigurative Chaos in the Novels of Muriel Spark

Introduction

Making a mockery	61
------------------	----

The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie

A woman in her prime	65
The primary transfiguration	69
Transfigurations transformed	74
An Economy of Style	75

The Abbess of Crewe

Introduction	79
The evidence of travesty	80
A babel of languages	81
A superior creation	84
An inferior competitor	86
On matters of state	89
The commonplace	90
A festive chaos	91
The absence of God	94

4 Conclusion

The hypothesis revisited	97
The authentic image	98
The deconstruction of romance	102
The travesty parody	104
Expectations of a feminist perspective	106