

“Poetry Deleted,” Parody Added: Watergate, Spark’s Style, and Bakhtin’s Stylistics

SHERYL STEVENSON

IN *Rabelais and His World*, Mikhail Bakhtin observes that elections were a defining feature of the medieval carnival and a traditional subject of carnivalesque parody. An “essential element” of the folk festival, he says, was

a reversal of the hierarchic levels: the jester was proclaimed king, a clownish abbot, bishop, or archbishop was elected at the “feast of fools,” and in the churches directly under the pope’s jurisdiction a mock pontiff was even chosen. The members of this hierarchy of fools sang solemn mass. At many of these feasts kings and queens were elected for a day, as on Epiphany and on St. Valentine’s day. The custom of electing such ephemeral kings and queens (*rois pour rire*) was especially widespread in France, where nearly every popular banquet was presided over by them. (81)

For Bakhtin, mock elections are part of the carnival’s “special idiom of forms and symbols” (*Rabelais* 10), developed over many centuries and absorbed within carnivalesque literary works as a means of degrading the pretensions of rank and authority. His descriptive catalogues of carnivalesque motifs point to an important tradition behind Muriel Spark’s 1974 novel, *The Abbess of Crewe*, a novel which transforms Nixonian presidential machinations into the intrigues of a Machiavellian nun who would be abbess. With its comically debased rites, cross-dressing nuns and priests, and scandal-haunted election, *The Abbess of Crewe* reveals its roots in traditional ecclesiastical and political satire.

Yet Spark’s translation of politics into religion, male into female, provoked censure in prominent reviews, by critics who dismissed the Nixon-to-nun inversion as a “thin gag” (Wood 29) or unilluminating “joke” (Spacks 590; see also Stade 5). Im-

mersed in Watergate news and texts, readers of the time might understandably see Spark's novel as a playful, light entertainment—"silly," as two sympathetic reviewers put it (Annan 1277; Glendinning 749). But at a distance of nearly two decades, we can now appreciate how *The Abbess of Crewe* exemplifies stylistic features which are both utterly characteristic of Spark and supremely appropriate to Watergate. Incorporating near or exact quotations from Watergate lore, electronics texts, the Rule of St. Benedict, and English poetry, the novel shows how repetitions and juxtapositions of diverse discourses produce alterations in their meanings. As familiar texts are quoted, deleted, blended, and changed by intonation or context, the novel's theme becomes not simply the politics of language—political uses of language to distort and delude—but the distortability of all language, the contextual nature of every discourse's meaning.

Bakhtin's similar emphasis on contextual meaning can draw attention to ways in which his texts and Spark's shed light on each other. Sharing an affiliation with forms of orthodox Christianity, both writers suggest that any word is never the Word, never an expression of unchanging truth.¹ Such a view of language informs Bakhtin's admiration for the nondogmatic "festive laughter" of the carnival, which "is also directed at those who laugh" (*Rabelais* 12). This same self-inclusive mockery is foregrounded by the epigraph of Spark's novel, taken from Yeats, which announces, "Come let us mock at the great," but then shifts targets: "Mock mockers after that / . . . for we / Traffic in mockery." Beyond this predilection for self-deflating ridicule which Spark shares with Bakhtin, her novel can also serve as a case study illustrating features he attributes to carnivalesque literature: coarse or obscene language (spoken by nuns, no less), outlandish shifts in clothing (including transvestism), and emphasis on bodily functions and desires, especially eating and sexuality.

Yet the most productive connection between Bakhtin and Spark may come out of the match of his stylistics with her style—areas in which scholarship on these two writers has not been ample. Criticism dealing with *The Abbess of Crewe* has concentrated almost exclusively on issues of genre or theme. Thus the

novel has been seen in terms of Catholic satire or "festive comedy," as an exploration of female power and community or a study of the shaping power of the media in contemporary society.² Though scholars have demonstrated that *The Abbess of Crewe* artfully evokes a host of ideas beyond its satire on Watergate, little attention has yet been focussed on the novel's stylistic texture, the arrangement of words which the reader encounters in the temporal, line-by-line unfolding of the text. Similarly, few scholars have explored the implications of Bakhtin's texts for stylistic analysis. As Kathleen Wales observes, in spite of Bakhtin's current prominence, "the impact of this dynamic and revelatory writer has yet to be fully felt in stylistics" (177). This lack of influence is surprising given the place accorded to Bakhtin in an important 1986 conference, "The Linguistics of Writing," which was intended to follow the 1958 Indiana University "Conference on Style" as a major consideration of intersections between literature and language studies (see Fabb and Durant 1-4). In one of the published papers from the conference, "After Bakhtin," David Lodge underscores the Russian theorist's significance as a prescient thinker whose ideas speak to crucial issues within contemporary critical debate. Lodge demonstrates applications of Bakhtin's taxonomies and concepts, showing ways to analyze modes of dialogic discourse in canonical writers such as Joyce and Lawrence. He subsequently reprinted this paper as the title piece in an essay collection of his own. Like David Lodge, Kathleen Wales suggests that Bakhtin points critics toward a crucial reorientation in stylistics: "What is needed is a kind of analysis for any type of text or discourse that arises from the focus on inherent or internal dialogism . . ." (184). Offering examples of such analysis, Wales discusses implied quotations of diverse discourses in Philip Larkin's poetry, as well as indicating hidden dialogues within monologues in *Ulysses* and *Hamlet*. Where Lodge concentrates on Bakhtin's contribution to "a poetics of fiction" (*After Bakhtin* 5), Wales emphasizes applications across a spectrum of genres. Both critics map out further directions for research from the intersection of Bakhtin studies and stylistics.

With a keen sense that every discourse, indeed every word, is fraught with social viewpoints, Bakhtin elaborated an analytical

method which is best described, using his own terms, as “a *sociological stylistics*” (*Dialogic* 300)—a form of analysis with a double focus, on the literary text and its social context. Benefits of this type of analytic framework are particularly apparent in a text like *The Abbess of Crewe*, which foregrounds historically specific discourses; within this novel, even individual words—“bungle,” “bugged,” “leaked”—are rank with Watergate associations. In addition, Spark’s fine-grained, economical style fully displays Bakhtin’s strengths, not just as the encyclopedist of gross, generic features in bawdy and parodic literary forms, but as an analyst of style at close range. I will be concentrating on two stylistic devices which Bakhtin discusses in *The Dialogic Imagination*: hybrid constructions and parodic quotations. But first let me fill in some of Spark’s delightful plotting, her version of Watergate.

The Abbess of Crewe presents the capers and scandal surrounding the election of its eponymous heroine, Alexandra, an aristocratic nun whose compelling style of leadership might be termed “aesthetic pragmatism,” since she manages to combine frequent quotations from English poetry, her first love, with studious application of Machiavelli’s *Art of War*. Threatened by a much less canny candidate, the free-love advocate Sister Felicity, Alexandra ensures her own accession by means of extensive electronic surveillance and by an attempted theft of Felicity’s love letters through a break-in which is bungled. Lofty Alexandra maintains throughout all the flak an unflappable self-possession, indeed a gaiety, never sullied by self-doubt or moral scruples. Beyond question a “lady,” as she herself demonstrates in an election-winning speech (74-80), Alexandra often assumes a royal, ceremonial style of speaking, occasionally announcing her actions by referring to herself by her title, in the third person. Yet her private discourse—much of which is recorded on tape—is peppered with numerous “low” forms of speech, as when she picks up gangster argot in sinister references to one of her henchwomen: “Winifrede is in it up to the neck, and the scandal stops at Winifrede” (14). When the scandal finally reaches Alexandra’s green office itself, and a greater sacrifice is required, the Abbess describes Sisters Mildred and Walburga—her closest associates,

now scapegoats—as “two of the finest nuns I have ever had the privilege to know” (99).

In its use of Watergate, *The Abbess of Crewe* exploits one of the oldest devices of parody, the displacement of elements from a well-known setting (or text or genre) into another context, as when a Lilliputian expounds remarkably British political conflicts or Disney's Pluto croons a Bing Crosby hit. Spark's displacement of Watergate to an English convent produces a similar ironic diminishment, though the effect might also be described by Victor Shklovsky's term *ostraneniye*, making strange or “defamiliarization,” the impeding of perception by art, so that the audience gains an intensified awareness of the familiar (12). The attention of Spark's reader is thus arrested by a strange sort of ventriloquy, as a ceremonious, ultrafeminine nun speaks in the tongues of Nixonese, garbling the sublime and the sordid.

With her stated goal of creating a “garble” in her tapes and in her media statements (92), Alexandra flaunts a mixed discourse which mocks political pretensions and intentions. But this characteristic mixing of discourses also makes Spark's narrative a showcase for instructive, entertaining use of hybrids, a device which Bakhtin defines as follows:

What we are calling a hybrid construction is an utterance that belongs, by its grammatical (syntactic) and compositional markers, to a single speaker, but that actually contains mixed within it two utterances, two speech manners, two styles, two “languages,” two semantic and axiological belief systems. (*Dialogic* 304)

Such constructions are inherently dialogic, in that they suggest differing—and, in Spark's novel, comically contradictory—ideologies inhering within a single speaker's discourse. We can see how *The Abbess of Crewe* taps the hybrid's comic potential in one of Alexandra's addresses to her cronies, who are beginning to panic about the possibility of “excommunication.” Alexandra asserts:

The more scandal there is from this point on the better. We are truly moving in a mythological context. We are the actors; the press and the public are the chorus. Every columnist has his own version of the same old story, as it were Aeschylus, Sophocles or Euripides, only of course, let me tell you, of a far inferior dramatic style. I read classics

for a year at Lady Margaret Hall before switching to Eng. Lit. However that may be—Walburga, Mildred, my Sisters—the facts of the matter are with us no longer, but have returned to God who gave them. We can't be excommunicated without the facts. As for the legal aspect, no judge in the kingdom would admit the case, let Felicity tell it like it was as she may. You cannot bring a charge against Agamemnon or subpoena Clytemnestra, can you? (16)

This passage typifies both the Abbess's discourse and Spark's hybrids in its mixing of claims to mythological status, pious reference to God, practical concern with "the facts," and crass remarks about style, summed up in the phrase "Eng. Lit." The hybrid dramatizes Alexandra's tendency to combine, when it suits her purposes, conflicting ideological stances—as in this case she reveals classical hubris, crude aestheticism, religious faith, and her usual pragmatism.

Alexandra's lengthy speech about the press, Aeschylus, and Eng. Lit. includes a line, "Let Felicity tell it like it was as she may," which reinforces a point Bakhtin makes about the hybrid. He holds that we cannot be certain that we should read invisible quotation marks within the hybrid, even though we may hear them around such a phrase as "tell it like it was." According to Bakhtin, words within hybrid constructions can suggest differing "accents" or intonations, creating ambiguities of meaning (*Dialogic* 305-08). Thus, in this particular case, the Abbess may simply be using a currently popular cliché; or she may, with a different intonation, be making fun of the cliché, with its assumptions that one can be sure of the "facts," an assumption she repeatedly mocks; or she may be taking a swipe at Felicity, whose free-love, counter-culture platform would associate her with such clichés. The possible intonations for Alexandra's words epitomize the ambiguity of Spark's narrative itself, in which contemporary buzz words jostle with repetitions of religious texts and formulaic phrases, such as "Deo gratias" and "be vigilant, be sober." This hybridization raises crucial questions about the narrative's tone and meaning: should the novel's religious discourses be taken as showing sources of norms, still available, or should they be seen more ironically, as emphasizing a worldly condition in which all sources of norms are perverted? Spark's hybridized narrative thus supports Bakhtin's contention that discourse never has an

abstract, general meaning, but instead each word takes on specific potential meanings, specific inflections, as it occurs in a particular situation.

The Abbess of Crewe seems to explore this idea in a scene capped by an exemplary hybrid, again from Alexandra's discourse. The speech occurs during an elegant repast lavished upon two visiting Jesuits, who are being recruited to help engineer Alexandra's election. Spark scrupulously details "the cups of tea, the plates and the little lace-edged napkins," "the cress sandwiches, the golden shortbread and the pastel-coloured *petits fours*" (54-55)—evidence of elitist privilege gained through misuse of power (and the dowries of the nuns, who are shown, in other scenes, eating concoctions of cat and dog food). The way in which the sumptuous tea colours the Abbess's words is suggested by the sentence which introduces her speech, describing how the Jesuits "watch Alexandra attentively as her words fall in with the silvery acoustics of the tea-spoons" (55). She addresses the men in this way:

Fathers, there are vast populations in the world which are dying or doomed to die through famine, under-nourishment and disease; people continue to make war, and will not stop, but rather prefer to send their young children into battle to be maimed or to die; political fanatics terrorise indiscriminately; tyrannous states are overthrown and replaced by worse tyrannies; the human race is possessed of a universal dementia; and it is at such a moment as this, Fathers, that your brother-Jesuit Thomas has taken to screwing our Sister Felicity by night under the poplars. . . . (55)

Of course, the word "screwing" is absurdly out of character with the rest of Alexandra's speech. Yet Bakhtin's emphasis on the ideological component of language enables us to see that the effect of such a passage involves more than a descent from formality to vulgarity in word choice. For the world view which would focus on Felicity and Thomas (and which would perceive their action as "screwing") is utterly in contradiction to the global orientation of Alexandra's opening remarks, which are themselves already undercut by the specific speech situation, the mingling of teaspoons and tyrannies.

The two examples of hybrids from Alexandra's discourse share certain features and effects. Both include a sudden shift down in diction, an effect of deflation or bathos that occurs especially

with the words "Eng. Lit." and "screwing"; both passages suggest not simply an inappropriate mixing of belief systems, but also a sense of moral disintegration, conveyed through a slide of discourses, a characteristic feature of Spark's novels. This feature can be clarified by turning to a second stylistic device which Bakhtin highlights: the juxtaposition of discourses through parodic quotation.

More than most novels, by Spark or any writer, *The Abbess of Crewe* incorporates numerous quotations of actual discourses. As a result, whole segments of the novel create an effect similar to that of the cento, a form of parody Bakhtin studies (*Dialogic* 69), in which a work is composed entirely of quotations from other works. One situation which generates strings of quotations in *The Abbess of Crewe* is Alexandra's penchant for reciting English poetry during the Hours of the Divine Office, the nuns' daily religious services. (The Abbess is thought to be chanting her responses in Latin.) Typically, the narrative quotes the nuns' religious verses first, with the lines of English poetry (voiced by Alexandra) quoted after. The narrator observes that Alexandra's "lips move as in a film dubbed into a strange language" (89), and we, like the audience of a foreign film, are aware of two simultaneous "languages" by reading the running subtitles, the written transcription of her speech. To glimpse specific ironies suggested by Spark's bringing together of religious discourses and English poetry, we need only consider Alexandra's addition to the Office of Lauds, celebrated at three a.m., when she chants her own lullaby from W. H. Auden:

Every farthing of the cost,
 All the dreaded cards foretell,
 Shall be paid, but from this night
 Not a whisper, not a thought,
 Not a kiss nor look be lost. (qtd. in *Abbess* 27)

Since Alexandra has bugged the convent and its grounds, while also having Felicity and Thomas's trysts in the orchard photographed, many readers would find that she gives new meaning to Auden's love poetry, providing memorable evidence of how words change with the context of their utterance.³

Strings of quotations also appear in *The Abbess of Crewe* in passages showing the nuns at meals, listening to a series of readings. In one such passage, the narrative introduces the quoted readings by first describing the reader:

Her voice is nasal, with a haughty twang of the hunting country stock from which she and her high-coloured complexion have at one time disengaged themselves. She stands stockily, remote from the words as she half-intones them. She is reading from the great and ancient Rule of St. Benedict, enumerating the instruments of good works. . . . (8)

This description underscores the disjunction between the speaker and her discourse, the woman whose "haughty," upper-class accent seems at odds with the injunctions to self-denial which she voices. The novel thus conveys how religious texts, like the Benedictine Rule, are always voiced anew, in a particular mood and situation which conditions their meanings. The Rule of St. Benedict itself, quoted for virtually a page of the novel, is also charged with ironic, situational meanings, since the behaviours enjoined by this work include not only "To fear the day of judgment," but also "To keep a continual watch on what we are doing with our life" and "To obey the commands of the Abbess in everything . . ." (9). Other passages in the novel playfully elaborate the implications of these excerpts from the Rule, suggesting that Alexandra only extends the authoritarian tendencies and traditional surveillance practices long established in Catholic monastic institutions.

Yet this scene of readings particularly typifies the novel's handling of discourses at the emblematic moment between readings, when "the reader closes the book on the lectern and opens another that is set by its side. She continues her incantations" (10). What the reader then intones is a lengthy passage from an electronics textbook, which begins in the following manner: "A frequency is the number of times a periodic phenomenon repeats itself in unit time" (10). Barbara Keyser observes that this shift "from the medieval text to the new bible" conveys Spark's sense of the mass media as the "new religion" of modern society (152). Replacing a guide to the religious life with a technological manual, injunctions to watchfulness with instructions for surveillance, Spark's juxtaposed quotations convey the slide of one

system of values into another, a lapse which takes numerous forms in the novel. This decline is first shown in Alexandra's move from the liturgical verse of the Divine Office to the erotic poetry she prefers. By repeating this motif of juxtaposed discourses in the scene of lunchtime readings, the novel suggests that the degeneration from religious to secular values filters from the Abbess to her nuns, who are epitomized by the mindless reader, "remote" from her words.

The incorporation of actual texts within her novels allows Muriel Spark to examine numerous readers and modes of reading. Thus, during another lunch, slow-witted Winifrede, under the Abbess's direction, reads aloud a passage from Ecclesiasticus (a book of the Apocrypha), then reads a verse from Ecclesiastes, and then introduces a passage from Machiavelli as "Further words of wisdom from one of our Faith" (53). After her conventional concluding formula, "Here endeth the reading," Winifrede is described as "looking stupidly round the still more stupid assembly into whose ears the words have come and from which they have gone" (53). These indiscriminating readers represent a passive reception of texts, just as the Abbess—voracious student of Machiavelli and English poetry—symbolizes those who aggressively manipulate texts to achieve their own ends. Fitting between these two extremes, Spark's model reader is perhaps best represented by Fleur Talbot in *Loitering With Intent*, another novel marked by blocks of quotations. In that text, when a misguided young woman reads aloud a passage from Newman's *Apologia pro Vita Sua*, she triggers a passionate repulsion in Fleur; as the novel's artist-heroine glimpses a tendency toward solipsism she had never before noticed in Newman, the reading of a once-loved text produces a powerful revision of its author (*Loitering* 94-96). Fleur surely embodies an ideal of the active reader, engaged in a process which is moral, reflective, and creative. In Spark's fiction, then, the incorporation of quoted discourses is often a means of examining readers making meaning of texts, which are shown as mutable, as taking on new meaning (or a new lack of meaning) in each unique situation of reading.

Parodic quotation is even practiced by the Abbess of Crewe herself, in a scene which especially underscores the mutability of texts and of individual words. In this scene, Alexandra and her top associates (soon to be patsies) look over "a list of Abbey crimes" (100), written by Felicity "with the aid of Thomas and Roget's *Thesaurus*" (101). Headed by the words, "*Wrongdoing committed by the Abbess of Crewe*," this list is read aloud by Alexandra, "in her clearest modulations":

Concealing, hiding, secreting, covering, screening, cloaking, veiling, shrouding, shading, muffling, masking, disguising, ensconcing, eclipsing, keeping in ignorance, blinding, hoodwinking, mystifying, posing, puzzling, perplexing, embarrassing, bewildering, reserving, suppressing, bamboozling, et cetera. (101-02)

Alexandra eventually shows that the "indictment" includes not just "defrauding" and "cheating," but also "diddling, . . . inveigling, luring, liming, swindling," and "making believe the moon is made of green cheese" (102). The thesaurus list captures what Bakhtin would call "heteroglossia," the "centrifugal" expansion of language, seen in the ceaseless coining and redefining of words which may express similar meanings, but which are stratified by their associations with various social groups and world views (*Dialogic* 270-73). Hence, in Felicity's heteroglot list, some words (like "defrauding" and "ensconcing") seem legal or formal, while others (like "diddling" or "bamboozling") carry the taint of lower class or slang usage. But where Felicity had elaborated the Abbess's offenses with her usual passionate lack of humour, the list becomes for Alexandra a source of wordplay, a text of pleasure, as she uses her opponent's words to explain why she and her cronies cannot destroy the tapes they have made through their bugging devices:

We need the tapes to trick, lure, lime, outwit, bamboozle, et cetera. There is one particular tape in which I prove my innocence of the bugging itself. I am walking with Winifrede under the poplars discussing the disguising and ensconcing as early as last summer. It is the tape that begins with the question, "What is wrong, Sister Winifrede, with the traditional keyhole method . . . ?" I replayed and rearranged it the other day, making believe the moon is green cheese with Winifrede's stupid reply which I rightly forget. (103)

In Alexandra's statement her parodic quotation of Felicity's formal accusation includes no quotation marks; Bakhtin would say that she has "appropriate[d]" and given her "own accent," her own "intention" or ideological viewpoint to words that are "half someone else's" (*Dialogic* 293). As the Abbess goes on to chant her "crimes," thesaurus-style, during Vespers, her first enumeration—"Taking, obtaining, benefiting, procuring . . ." (104)—is followed by another, spinning out words which denote the taking of pleasure: "Gloating, being pleased, deriving pleasure et cetera, taking delight in, rejoicing in, . . . revelling, luxuriating, being on velvet, being in clover, slaking the appetite, *faisant ses choux gras*, basking in the sunshine, treading on enchanted ground" (104). Clearly, the Abbess delights in taking possession of Felicity's words, robbing them of any taint of judgment, and infusing them with her own sense of pleasure, perhaps in the "crimes" themselves or perhaps in the mere proliferation of words, words she can make use of—high, low, Latinate, slang, and cliché—with an all-inclusiveness that makes the thesaurus an apt model for her own discourse.

Bakhtin's stylistic analysis highlights such mixtures of social discourses incorporated within a narrative, showing how a character's or narrator's discourse is often a hybrid—composed of disparate idioms, embodying diverse ideological stances. In Spark's cento-like narrative, the dialogic relationship between incorporated languages is intensified. Setting a Christian perspective beside the perspectives of English poetry or Machiavelli's *Art of War*, the novel suggests ironic similarities as well as a downward slide. That even English poetry, in itself, can be seen as representing or implying an ideological position is apparent when the Abbess instructs her nuns to cut all quotations of poetry from the transcripts of her tapes, which are being carefully edited for Rome; she of course has her underlings mark the resulting gaps with the words "Poetry deleted" (116), thus implicitly equating famous lines from Marvell and Auden with the expletives whose marked absences became such a notorious presence in the transcripts of the Watergate tapes.

The Abbess of Crewe is rightly seen as a political novel, and even as a Watergate novel, in that it focusses on how the dynamic,

situational character of meaning in language can be exploited by the unscrupulous and the powerful—how words can be moved about, repeated, quoted “out of context,” causing radical alterations of their meanings. Spark’s most humorous example of this word-twisting occurs when the Abbess urges poor Winifrede to sign a confession, “the usual form of confession” (106), which the narrative then quotes:

I confess to Almighty God, to blessed Mary ever Virgin, to blessed Michael the Archangel, to blessed John the Baptist, to the holy apostles Peter and Paul, and to all the saints, that I have sinned exceedingly in thought, word and deed, through my fault, through my fault, through my most grievous fault. (107)

Alexandra persuades Winifrede to sign by arguing that all Catholics “lodge this solemn deposition” at Mass (107). She adds, “Even the Pope . . . offers the very same damaging testimony every morning of his life. . . . And all I am saying, Winifrede, is that what’s good enough for the Supreme Pontiff is good enough for you” (107-08). Yet the Abbess later clears herself during a television appearance by loosely stating that she has Winifrede’s “signed confession” (111); she thus turns the Catholic Confiteor into a legal document, a move anticipated by some of the words (“deposition,” “testimony”) she had used on her deluded scapegoat. The final symbol for this distortability of language is Alexandra’s “orchestration” (115; 103) of her tapes, which she describes (in a passage quoted above) by selective quotation from the novel’s opening scene, beginning with her question, “What is wrong, Sister Winifrede, . . . with the traditional keyhole method?” (1). Occurring at the end of the novel, this brief return to the beginning makes it clear that, when suitably “replayed and rearranged,” Alexandra’s words and those of others can be used to “mak[e] believe the moon is green cheese” (103), or in other words, to show that she is innocent.

The novel’s proliferation of quoted and paraphrased discourses dramatizes how traditional sources of norms, such as religious texts, can be sapped of significance by repetition, while these and other discourses can be orchestrated by the powerful to create an obscuring “mythology” or “garble,” two of Alexandra’s favorite words. Spark’s radical devaluation of language

intersects with Bakhtin's celebration of ever-changing words, as both writers stress the shiftiness of discourse, the situational character of meaning. The novelist's more negative angle of perception is ideally represented by Watergate, a cultural symbol of debased language and distorted texts, and a phenomenon known to us through orchestrated tapes, transcripts, reportage, and televised hearings—all of which discourses, Spark implies, are necessarily limited. Though Bakhtin is usually seen as a more sanguine, indeed utopian, thinker, his conception of parody provides one way of justifying such thoroughgoing linguistic skepticism. In his view, "no single type of direct discourse"—including the "artistic, rhetorical, philosophical, religious, [and] ordinary everyday"—will avoid being the subject of parody; "such mimicry" shows how any given discourse is "one-sided, bounded, incapable of exhausting the object" (*Dialogic* 53, 55). Yet although Mikhail Bakhtin's ideas about language and parody illuminate Muriel Spark's stance as a novelist, his sociological stylistics can show how a primary target of *The Abbess of Crewe* is language itself, with its necessary traffic in quotations, deletions, borrowings, and thefts, as well as its corrective addition of parody.

NOTES

- 1 For Spark's often-quoted views of her fiction as "a pack of lies," in relation to forms of "truth," see her interview with Kermode (80-81). The idea that any discourse is "bounded," an expression of a limited ideological viewpoint which will inevitably be drawn into "dialogue" with other viewpoints, permeates Bakhtin's texts; for a concise statement, see *The Dialogic Imagination* 55.
- 2 These four approaches to the novel can be seen in Whittaker, Little, Auerbach, and Keyser. For studies which develop the position that *The Abbess of Crewe* is centrally concerned not with politics but with problems of contemporary Catholicism, see Richmond, Edgecombe, and Hynes. Little and Edgecombe note parallels between Spark's work and facets of medieval festivals.
- 3 Hutcheon stresses this idea in her Bakhtin-influenced *Theory of Parody*: "No integration into a new context can avoid altering meaning, and perhaps even value" (8). Parodic quotation figures heavily within Hutcheon's study, since she sees the incorporation or imitation of specific works of art within other works as a crucial manifestation of modern art's self-reflexivity.

WORKS CITED

- Annan, Gabriele. "Holy Watergate." *Times Literary Supplement* 15 Nov. 1974: 1277.
- Auden, W. H. "Lullaby." *Collected Shorter Poems 1927-1957*. London: Faber, 1966. 107-08.

- Auerbach, Nina. *Communities of Women: An Idea in Fiction*. Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1978.
- Bakhtin, M. M. *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*. Trans. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist. Ed. Michael Holquist. Austin: U of Texas P, 1981.
- . [Mikhail]. *Rabelais and His World*. Trans. Hélène Iswolsky. 1968. Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1984.
- Edgecombe, Rodney Stenning. *Vocation and Identity in the Fiction of Muriel Spark*. Columbia: U of Missouri P, 1990.
- Fabb, Nigel, and Alan Durant. "Introduction: The Linguistics of Writing: Retrospect and Prospect after Twenty-Five Years." Fabb et al. 1-14.
- Fabb, Nigel, et al., eds. *The Linguistics of Writing: Arguments between Language and Literature*. New York: Methuen, 1987.
- Glendinning, Victoria. "Spark Plug." *New Statesman* 22 Nov. 1974: 749.
- Hutcheon, Linda. *A Theory of Parody: The Teachings of Twentieth-Century Art Forms*. New York: Methuen, 1985.
- Hynes, Joseph. *The Art of the Real: Muriel Spark's Novels*. Rutherford, NJ: Fairleigh Dickinson UP, 1988.
- Keyser, Barbara Y. "Muriel Spark, Watergate, and the Mass Media." *Arizona Quarterly* 32 (1976): 146-53.
- Little, Judy. *Comedy and the Woman Writer: Woolf, Spark, and Feminism*. Lincoln: U of Nebraska P, 1983.
- Lodge, David. "After Bakhtin." Fabb et al. 89-102. Rpt. in Lodge, *After Bakhtin* 87-99.
- . *After Bakhtin: Essays on Fiction and Criticism*. London: Routledge, 1990.
- Richmond, Velma Bourgeois. *Muriel Spark*. New York: Frederick Ungar, 1984.
- Shklovsky, Victor. "Art as Technique." *Russian Formalist Criticism: Four Essays*. Trans. Lee T. Lemon and Marion J. Reis. Lincoln: U of Nebraska P, 1965. 3-24.
- Spacks, Patricia Meyer. "New Novels: In the Dumps." *The Yale Review* 64 (1975): 583-94.
- Spark, Muriel. *The Abbess of Crewe*. New York: Viking, 1974.
- . "The House of Fiction: Interviews with Seven English Novelists." By Frank Kermode. *Partisan Review* 30 (1963): 61-82.
- . *Loitering With Intent*. New York: Perigree-Putnam's, 1981.
- Stade, George. "A Spark, an Amis, a Rhys." Rev. of *The Abbess of Crewe*, by Muriel Spark, *Ending Up*, by Kingsley Amis, and *Tigers Are Better Looking*, by Jean Rhys. *New York Times Book Review* 20 Oct. 1974: 4-6.
- Wales, Kathleen. "Back to the Future: Bakhtin, Stylistics and Discourse." *The Taming of the Text: Explorations in Language, Literature and Culture*. Ed. Willie Van Peer. London: Routledge, 1988. 176-92.
- Whittaker, Ruth. *The Faith and Fiction of Muriel Spark*. New York: St. Martin's, 1982.
- Wood, Michael. "Fiction in Extremis." *New York Review of Books* 28 Nov. 1974: 29-31.