On Her Way Rejoicing: The Fiction Of Muriel Spark

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Muriel spark. Many professions are associated with a particular stereotype. The classic image of a writer, for instance, is of a slightly demented-looking person, locked in an attic, scribbling away furiously for days on end. Naturally, he has his favourite pen and note-paper, or a beat-up old typewriter, without which he could not produce a readable word. Nowadays, we know that such images bear little resemblance to reality. As well as her “fetish” about writing materials, Muriel Spark shares one other characteristic with the stereotypical “writer” — her work is the most important thing in her life. It has stopped her from remarrying; cost her old friends and made her new ones; and driven her from London to New York, to Rome. Today, she lives in the Italian province of Tuscany with a friend. Small wonder, then, that Muriel Spark ends her first volume of memoirs by going on her way rejoicing. But hold it there a minute. The happy result of Muriel Spark’s method is that she is a writer who writes books against which uninteresting critical categories to do with elitist and populist, highbrow and lowbrow, mean nothing much. She is popular with teenagers, she is popular with oldies, she is popular with highbrow Catholic aristos and she’s popular with low-down faithless types like me. And she is popular with all these people in a special and interesting way. Unlike the T.S. Eliot who helped her on the way to her nervous breakdown, Muriel Spark does not write elaborate palimpsests off which you get one thing if you