

Choosing Faith over Fear: A Study of Muriel Spark's *The Public Image*

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Abstract

The Public Image by Muriel Spark is a prodigious novel which emphasizes the significance of choosing faith over fear in every circumstance of life. It is a profound exploration of fame, identity and the sustenance of a female celebrity, who wisely balances her public and personal life. Muriel Spark intensely highlights the celebrity culture, the role of media and the expectations of the society in shaping an individual's image. The research paper intends to glorify the courage and perseverance of the protagonist who willingly chooses to overcome fear and proceeds with unwavering faith through her arduous journey of life.

Keywords: Faith, Fear, Courage, Transformation, Resilience

Introduction

Muriel Spark, a versatile Scottish writer of the twentieth century is celebrated for her distinctive narrative style, satirical portrayal of characters and moralistic approach towards her readers. She has widely contributed novels, short stories, poems and essays. Muriel Spark's novels established her excellence and fame in her literary career. They are creatively crafted with sharp satire and deep moral exploration. Muriel Spark's writings are applauded for her concise and meaningful narration which instills an ardent curiosity in the readers. Her novels are grounded on themes such as identity crisis, power dynamics between individuals and institutions, destiny and Divine will, mortality, complexities of human behavior, religious faith, alienation and betrayal.

Muriel Spark's *The Public Image* is a satirical masterpiece which keenly displays the celebrity culture and the dissonance between an individual's personal life and public perception. The novel presents various themes of identity, quest for freedom, existential crisis, betrayal and conflicting relationship. The psychological turmoil of the protagonist Annabel Christopher is extensively described through her constant battle between faith and fear throughout the novel. Muriel Spark focuses the enduring courage of the protagonist, who overcomes her fears and survives against all the odds in the society.

Faith in *The Public Image*

Faith is the assurance or strong belief in something without any tangible evidence. It is usually perceived in multifarious contexts comprising religious, philosophical, emotional and interpersonal dimensions. Faith provides strength and perseverance in all difficult circumstances of life. Faith is a progressive concept which motivates an individual to expect positive results even amidst unfavorable situations. It constructs resilience through different experiences and stimulates the individual to accomplish his goals.

In a world of uncertainty, faith provides meaning and purpose to life.

Muriel Spark's *The Public Image* emphasizes the concept of faith through the lens of personal relationships, public personas and moral integrity. Annabel Christopher, a rising film star is depicted as a virtuous woman who aspires to achieve tremendously in her acting career. She is fondly celebrated as the English Tiger-Lady. She preserves her public image cautiously without rendering space for negative portrayal of her life. Contrarily, Annabel Christopher's marital life is filled with deceit and discontentment. Her husband Frederick loses trust in her and intends to manipulate her behavior in order to distort her fame and ruin her flawless public image. He always schemes to destroy his wife's career and reputation. He possesses a superiority complex, as he lacks talent and proper education. He feels threatened by the wondrous success of his wife. He loiters behind other women and involves in illegal affairs with various young actresses. He fails in his loyalty towards his wife, intending to underestimate their marriage life. Despite Frederick's resentment, deceit and indirect opposition during her acting career, Annabel Christopher manages to flourish in her endeavors with strong faith and courage. She boldly encounters all the challenges and preserves her identity in the public. She demonstrates a form of faith in herself and works relentlessly to achieve her dreams. She strives to maintain a frictionless relationship with her husband and remains loyal to him. She toils untiringly to manage her relationship, profession and personal life. In the novel, Muriel Spark uses faith as a tool to examine the fragility of human relationships, the pressures of fame and the moral dilemmas of surviving in an unreal world. The characters in Muriel Spark's novels rely on personal faith to make moral decisions and confront ethical struggles. They experience spiritual awakening and transform into better individuals through the magnanimous power of faith.

Fear in *The Public Image*

Fear is a fundamental human emotion which is aroused by a strong sense of apprehension. It is an unpleasant response to a perceived threat, danger or any kind of harm. It is a distressing feeling that is triggered by a real or imagined threat. In Muriel Spark's *The Public Image*, Annabel Christopher experiences variety of fears through different phases of her life. As a modest actress, she always intends to showcase herself in a perfect picture to the society. She constantly fears of fulfilling the expectations of the society in both professional and personal life. Annabel Christopher is extremely anxious about any factor which would tarnish her public image. She continuously battles the fear of losing her good reputation, which may lead to public humiliation.

In *The Public Image*, Muriel Spark depicts the dominant power of media, which plays a crucial role in promoting a public figure or devastating their image effectively. It is apparent that media functions prominently in carving the society's perceptions and expectations about a celebrity, pressurizing them to live under constant public scrutiny. The protagonist Annabel Christopher experiences tangible fears of scandal and judgment in her daily life, which further drives her into the thoughts of existential crisis. She worries about losing her identity and dreads about failing in her successful acting career.

Annabel Christopher's relationship with her husband is visibly rooted in fear and discontentment. Frederick lives with her in order to enjoy the benefits of luxury and fame. He loses interest in his wife and loiters around young women. He involves in numerous extra marital affairs, creating a huge void in his marriage life. Annabel Christopher is deeply threatened by her husband's constant resentment and betrayal. Frederick's lack of loyalty aggravates the fear of separation and abandonment in Annabel Christopher's mind. Frederick frets about losing his dignity and desires to prove his worth to the society.

He takes enormous efforts to destroy his wife's hard-earned reputation by his scrupulous plans. He ridicules his wife as an insignificant and stupid woman in front of his friends. Frederick's behavior weakens Annabel's confidence, making her vulnerable and depressed. The climax of the novel triggers terror and anxiety in the protagonist. Frederick wickedly plans for a party in their flat, inviting rogues to his home in order to destroy his wife's public reputation. Annabel Christopher, who is unaware about the event veils her confusion and treats the guest decently. She encounters the biggest challenge in her life after the conclusion of the event. Frederick commits suicide, leaving goodbye letters to his wife, family and friends. His letters present a false accusation about his wife's infidelity, negligent attitude, alcohol addiction and immodest celebrity life. Frederick seems to create a sense of looming danger throughout the novel. Muriel Spark portrays Frederick as the most annoying antagonist in the novel, since he creates chaos and negativity in the subsequent scenes of the plot. Muriel Spark repeatedly registers the fact that fear is an inevitable emotion which is interwoven in all facets of a human being's life.

The Triumph of Faith over Fear

In *The Public Image*, Muriel Spark characterizes Annabel Christopher as a determined woman who navigates her fears and cynical circumstances with her resilience and strong faith. She exhibits calmness and maintains composure amidst the unending betrayal, the threat of scandal and the ruthless public scrutiny. She ensures to remain rigid without succumbing to the panic and chaos around her. She transforms her vulnerability into strength by preventing fear to control her actions. Annabel Christopher manages to maintain her public image even during the times of adversity. Though she is dictated by many external expectations, she possesses an inner strength and unshakeable faith which enables her to rise above fear. Annabel's fascinating ability to control her emotions in her professional and personal life motivates her to overcome the prevailing challenges and struggles. At the closure of the novel, Annabel Christopher courageously prepares herself to face the consequences of Frederick's death with brevity and acceptance. She chooses to progress forward instead of dwelling in fear and despair. Annabel Christopher wisely gains sympathy from the society by positioning herself as a victim of her husband's instability. After Frederick's demise, his friend Billy blackmails Annabel by collecting Frederick's final letters and threatens her to pay a sum of money to him. He warns her that he would release the letters to the press if she fails to pay him. Despite her lawyer's advice to pay Billy, Annabel Christopher boldly refuses to pay Billy and she produces Frederick's letters in the court. She bravely stands up for her rights and justifies herself before the public. She realizes that it is the right time to depart from her acting career. Annabel Christopher attains freedom and peace of mind, ignoring the perceptions and opinions of the society. She dares to expose the harsh reality of her personal life, without minding about the media and her public image. She liberates herself from the passion of preserving her public image. Annabel Christopher chooses to live a new life with freedom and faith, and she moves to Greece along with her baby. She upholds her faith diligently through all the hardships and conquers her fears with persevering hope. In the novel, Muriel Spark highlights Annabel's ability to adapt, confront and rise above her professional and personal crisis. She emphasizes the necessity of having faith and believing one's ability in all walks of life. Faith is an essential belief which serves as a source of comfort for an individual and poses a challenge to complacency and despondency of human beings.

Conclusion

In *The Public Image*, fear functions at different levels, ranging from the personal anxieties to the societal pressures. It moulds the lives and decisions of the characters. It is a recurring theme in Muriel Spark's works, which examines human psychology, morality and existential thoughts. Muriel Spark's treatment of fear in her novels provides better understanding about human nature. Fear acts as stimulator in grooming the behavior and character of the individuals. Muriel Spark's novels portray faith as a significant theme, which highlights the psychological and spiritual depths of the characters. In the novel *The Public Image*, the theme of faith overcoming fear is excellently depicted through Annabel's complicated journey. Despite the numerous challenges and struggles, Annabel's faith in her own ability and power enabled her to attain a better future. Muriel Spark glorifies Annabel's faith and endurance, which nullifies the effects of fear and makes her journey a profound triumph. Thus, Muriel Spark inspires the readers to embrace faith and elude all the fears in order to accomplish a progressive journey.

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