ISSN: 1304-4796
Manisa Celal Bayar Üniversitesi Sosyal Bilimler Dergisi
Manisa Celal Bayar University Journal of Social Sciences
2024; 22 (3);205-224

The Use of Deconstructive Parody in Muriel Spark's Novel *Not to Disturb*

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ABSTRACT

The prolific British-Scottish novelist Muriel Spark depicts the plight of the owners of a Gothic-style chateau in Geneva, the Baron and Baroness Klopstock, and their servants in her purposefully brief and infinitely suggestive novel *Not to Disturb* (1971). The approaching tragedy that will encompass the deaths of Klopstocks and Victor, their secretary and lover, is something the butler Lister is bracing himself for. Servants of the chateau are not permitted to bother these three captives who are detained in the library for the night. While the servants are the ones who planned the murder with the intention of inheriting a fortune, due to the expectant housemaid Heloise's marriage to the lunatic and sole heir to Klopstock's fortune residing in the attic, they nevertheless seem to be shocked and saddened by the discovery of three dead bodies the following morning. This paper argues that *Not to Disturb*, in this sense, offers a brilliant deconstructive parody of the Gothic novel and Jacobean drama genres by dissecting their essential elements, cliches, and traditions and then reincorporating them into the story in a whole new twentieth-century self-reflexive light.

Keywords: *Muriel Spark, "Not To Disturb", Jacobean Drama, Gothic Novel, Deconstructive Parody.*

Muriel Spark'ın *Rahatsız Etmeyin* Romanında Dekonstrüktif Parodi Kullanımı

ÖZET

Üretken İngiliz-İskoç roman yazarı Muriel Spark, kısa ve son derece müstehcen romanı *Rahatsız Etmeyin*'de (1971), Cenevre'deki Gotik şato'nun sahipleri olan, Baron ve Barones Klopstock ile hizmetkarlarının içinde bulunduğu dramatik durumu anlatmaktadır. Klopstocklar ve onların sekreteri, aynı zamanda sevgilisi olan Victor'un gerçekleşecek ölümlerini içerecek trajedi, uşak Lister'in kendisini önceden hazırladığı bir durumdur. Şatonun hizmetlileri gece kütüphanede tutulan bu üç tutsağın rahatsız edilmelerine izin vermemektedir. Bu cinayetleri planlayan hizmetkarlar, hamile hizmetçi Heloise'ı çatı katında yaşayan Klopstock'un servetinin tek varisi olan deli erkek kardeşi ile evlendirerek, bu serveti miras almak amacıyla cinayetleri planlayanlar olmalarına rağmen, yine de ertesi sabah üç ceset bulunduğunda şok olmuş ve üzülmüş gibi

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(Submission: 20.04.2024 / Published:30.09.2024)
Doi Number: 10.18026/cbayarsos.1471463
Type of Research: Research Article

görünmektedirler. Bu bağlamda, bu makale Muriel Spark'ın, *Rahatsız Etmeyin* romanı içerisinde bulunan Gotik roman ve Jakoben drama türlerinin temel unsurlarını, klişelerini ve geleneklerini parçalara ayırıp, ardından yirminci yüzyıl öz-düşünümsel bilgi ışığında, tekrar derleyip tamamen yeni bir hikâyeye dahil ederek parlak bir dekonstrüktif parodi sunduğunu savunmaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: *Muriel Spark, "Rahatsız Etmeyin", Jakoben Drama, Gotik Roman, Dekonstrüktif Parodi.*

1. INTRODUCTION AND THEORETICAL PREMISES

In her intentionally compact and infinitely suggestive novel *Not to Disturb* (1971) Muriel Spark, a prolific British-Scottish novelist, presents a narrative epitomizing on the plight of the owners of a Gothic-like chateau in the premises of Geneva, the Baron and Baroness Klopstock, and their servants. The butler Lister is getting ready for a looming tragedy: the deaths of his masters and Victor, who serves as both their secretary and lover. These three are imprisoned in the library for a night, and staff members are not allowed to disturb them. The servants appear affected and taken aback by the discovery of the three dead bodies the next morning, even though they were the ones who carefully devised the murder aimed at inheriting a substantial sum of money as a result of marriage of the pregnant housemaid Heloise to the Baron's mad brother and the only successor living in the attic. In this connection, *Not to Disturb* presents a genius deconstructive parody of traditional genres of Jacobean Drama and Gothic novel, by tearing apart their main components, clichés, and conventions, so as to reaccommodate them in the novel in a completely different twentieth century self-reflexive light.

Speaking of *Not to Disturb*, Muriel Spark once pointed out that "there is an element of extravaganza, obviously, [in my novel]. One of my motives is to provoke the reader; to startle, as well as to please" (Kemp, 1974, p.141). To achieve her aim, Spark employs the technique of deconstructive expectation-jarring parody to frustrate the traditional genre expectations of the reader, by intentionally violating causal thinking, and constructing situations that are noticeably irrational, having their roots in inexplicable juxtapositions, absurdity, misinterpretations, falsehood, deception, and manifestations of nonsense. Muriel Spark justifies her choice of the narrative technique in the essay entitled "The Desegregation of Art" (1970) by stating that:

> The art and literature of sentiment and emotion, however beautiful in itself, however striking in its depiction of actuality, has to go. It cheats us into a sense of involvement with life and society, but in reality, it is a segregated activity. In its place I advocate the arts of satire and ridicule. And I see no other living art form in the future (p. 24).

Thus, Spark openly pronounces her disillusionment with the traditional concepts of good and evil, permeating literary works well into modernity, and substitutes them with alternative notions of "absurdity and intelligence" (Armstrong, 1970, p. 8), indispensable, according to the author, to achieve visible change in society by means of art. In this

connection Spark admits that "ridicule is the only respectable weapon we have. In a way, I think it's probably the deadliest [one]" (McQuillan, 2002, p. 222).

To demonstrate her deepest disillusionment with the outmoded understanding of good and evil in art and to attain at least some sort of societal change, Muriel Spark directed her sharp parody at the overclassified, by the onset of the twentieth century, genres of Jacobean drama and Gothic novel, originally aiming to bring forward and to transmute the baddness of the overly bad through suffering and drama of the goodness of the overly good. Yet, the failure of the two genres to reach this aim due to their manifest emphasis on the signifier-based form rather than the signified-grounded contents, resulted in the lack of connotative subtlety of the two genres and their impotence to offer state-of-the-art ontological, epistemological and ethical interpretation of the world to the modern reader. Thus,

> The skull-headed lady, the vampire gentleman, the whole troop of monks and monsters who once froze and terrified now gibber in some dark cupboard of the servants' hall. In our day we flatter ourselves the effect is produced by subtler means. It is at the ghosts within us that we shudder, and not at the decaying bodies of barons or the subterranean activities of ghouls. (Little, 1983: 114)

For this reason, the musty air surrounding the genres of Jacobean drama and Gothic novel struggling "to introduce the unnameable into a genre which derived much of its strength from an insistence on naming names" (Kristeva, 1982: 37) served as a fertile soil for Muriel Spark's innovative experimentation with deconstructive parody.

As a result, most of Spark's experimental novels, *Not to Disturb* being no exception, do not aim to be forthright discourses of truth as essence, fashioned in the straightforward, serious, and methodical manner. Instead, they engage themselves in questioning, repeating, dividing, relocating, and modifying the system of values associated with the concept of truth in a language. It is for this reason that *Not to Disturb* may be rightly called a specimen of deconstructive parody, encompassing deconstruction, as a hermeneutic method of critical disassembling analysis envisioning meaning as infinite and superseding the author of the text, and parody, as an artistic practice imitating the text with irony and ridicule.

Jacques Derrida, the French thinker and theorist, originated the idea of deconstruction in an opus *Of Grammatology* (1967) and delineated its major functions as a method of critical analysis:

> The movements of deconstruction do not destroy structures from the outside. They are not possible and effective, nor can they take accurate aim, except by inhabiting those structures. Operating necessarily from the inside, borrowing all the strategic and economic resources of subversion from the old structure, borrowing them structurally, that is to say without being able to isolate their elements and atoms, the enterprise of deconstruction always falls prey to its own work (p. 24).

Thus, just like a parasite intruding into a living organism, deconstruction intrudes the structures of the texts and ideas it critiques. Be it structuralism or phenomenology, deconstruction functions from inside the premises of metaphysical narratives, demonstrating where they split and collapse and how they are unable to totalize the visions they articulate. Deconstruction is always inferior to the original thought, "borrowing all the strategic and economic resources of subversion from the old structure" (Derrida, 1967, p. 24). Hence, deconstructive reading as a tool of critical analysis has the potential to aggressively transform any text into a narrative about its innate inability to withstand the unpredictable play of language.

Parody, in its turn, as a type of artistic practice, welcomes readings of the kind with no unease about the arising outcomes. It is pre-eminently "a genre-bricoleur living off the energies and inadequacies of previous writings, borrowing them structurally and transforming them with a critical eye" (Derrida, 1967, p. 26). As a result, in contrast to aggressive nature of deconstruction, parody acts as a tool of productive revitalization of conventions through the process of laying bare the inadequacies of certain forms. Indeed,

> Parody invites more literary reading, a recognition of literary codes. But it is wrong to see the end of this process as mockery, ridicule or mere destruction. Parody imitates as a way to a new form which is just as serious and valid, as a synthesis, as the form it dialectically attempts to surpass (Hutcheon, 1984, p. 25).

As can be seen, parody does not indifferently demolish the texts on which it parasitically survives. In its place, it leaves the origin and structure of these texts visible, but, at the same time, obfuscated and degraded. In this connection, it seems necessary to dwell upon the concept of Derridian *différance* as a crucial relationship and ongoing cross-referencing between the parody and its model. Without understanding how parody varies from its model and what it first appears to be, we are unable to interpret it as parody as such. Derrida claims that *différance* is "both a spacing and a temporization" (1982, p. 7). Hence, *différance* keeps the reader away from identifying with neither the text of the parody nor with the model discourse by forcing him to constantly alternate between deconstructing the model discourse and attempting to flourish within the deconstructed text:

> *Différance*, the disappearance of any originary presence, is at once the condition of possibility and the condition of impossibility of truth. The being - present in its truth, in the presence of its identity and in the identity of its presence, is doubled as soon as it appears as soon as it presents itself. It appears, in its essence, as the possibility of its own most proper non-truth, of its pseudo truth reflected in the icon, the phantasm, or the simulacrum. And its identity is hollowed out by that addition, withdraws itself in the supplement that presents it (Derrida, 1981, p. 68).

As a result, parody represents the things it mocks, but it goes beyond mere repetition - what translations aim to accomplish, or elaboration - what imitations try to achieve. Parody

shifts, alters, diverges, and suspends, which makes it an unstable concept primarily based on the readerly context, rather than a score of set characteristics. For this reason, as "nothing [can exist] outside the text" (Derrida, 1988, p. 136), both, parody, as an artistic practice, and deconstruction, as a tool of critical analysis, are contained by textuality. They find resonance within language without trying to venture out into the realms of sheer originality or representation. Hence, both deconstruction and parody are destined to co-exist in the realm of linguistic, rather than semantic interplay; they never purport to reflect a whole presence, which makes it possible to unite them within a single framework of deconstructive parody.

A deconstructive parody is never limited with a specific aesthetic piece but can incorporate a variety of discourses within its framework. As a result, on the structural level it can mock certain genres with their accompanying conventions and forms, while on the thematic level, the ironic imitation is based on themes characteristic of these generic discourses. For this reason, the aim of this paper is to provide a detailed structural and thematic examination of Muriel Spark's novel *Not to Disturb* as a deconstructive parody of the genres of Jacobean drama and Gothic novel.

2. METHOD

In order to bring to light Muriel Spark's implementation of the technique of deconstructive parody, which she successfully used in many of her literary works, this paper analyzes the structure and themes of her novel *Not to Disturb* against the grid of the Gothic and Jacobean drama genres. This is done by "identifying themes, i.e. patterns in the text that are important or interesting" (Maguire and Delahunt, 2017, p. 3). Based on the method of "looking beyond what has been said" (Maguire and Delahunt, 2017, p. 3), the thematic scrutiny of *Not to Disturb* centers on the "underlying ideas, assumptions, conceptualizations and ideologies" (Braun and Clarke, 2006, p. 84) which construct the body of connotation in Spark's work of fiction, as well as demonstrate Muriel Spark's mastery of deconstructive parody.

3. *NOT TO DISTURB* AS A DECONSTRUCTIVE PARODY OF JACOBEAN DRAMA

The term Jacobean drama may be applied to the literary genre predominant in the period of English history that coincides with the turbulent reign of King James I (1603-1625), who had reigned as King James VI of Scotland for 36 years before ascending the English throne ensuing the death of the nulliparous Queen Elizabeth I in 1603. English drama of that time was greatly influenced by the literary tradition of the Roman stoic thinker, statesman and dramatist Lucius Annaeus Seneca (4 BC - AD 65), by appropriating his "rhetorical style, horrific descriptions, tyrants and traitors" (Rees, 1969, p. 123). The translation of Senecan plays *Troades*, *Thyestes*, and *Hercules Furens* into English in 1560s marked the dawn of a new current in English drama, which did not only imitate the postulates of Senecan drama, as in Gascoigne's play *Jocaste* (1566) and Robert Wilmot's plays *Tancret and Gismund* (1567) and *Gismond of Salerne* (1567), but also produced the first specimens of the genre,

that was to become known as Jacobean Drama. It was William Shakespeare in *Titus Andronicus* (1593) and Thomas Kyd in *The Spanish Tragedy* (1592) who aggregated Elizabethan romantic tragedy with Senecan dramatic canons, which "with its powerful motives, directed an age, and shaped the drama of the time" (Charlton, 1946, p. cxlv).

As a philosopher, Seneca kept a close scrutiny of social problems of his age, for this reason his writings were permeated with themes of evil and terror, while the themes of "exile, murder, incest, the threat of poverty and a hideous death, and all the savagery of fortune were the very texture of his career" (Winston, 2006, p. 37). The themes pertaining to the fallen nature of human soul, be it "haughtiness, arrogancy, ambition, pride, injury, anger, wrath, envy, hatred, contention, murder, cruelty, rapine, ravings, depredations, piracy, robbery, rebellion, treason, killing, hewing, stabbing, dagger-drawing, fighting, butchery, treachery, villainy and all kind of heroic evils" (Rees, 1969, p. 131), were supplemented with the themes of divine providence and the consequences of disobeying the rules of gods. As a result, most of early Jacobean tragedies that used Seneca as a model comprised a compelling narrative based on gore, bloodshed, and terror. Another dominant thematical element of Seneca's plays was that of revenge, which served as a helpful tool to produce an overwhelming sense of disaster and contradiction in the play. Seneca's acts of revenge were not typical: they explained the terrible deeds of his characters and were often embellished with horrific penalties, turning revenge into the ultimate goal of the tragedy. Hence, to transform a narrative piece into tragedy, characters were forced to commit suicide, slaughter, or retaliate, turning revenge into "an obligation not a choice" (Bowers, 1940, p. 4), as it happens in Shakespeare's *Titus Andronicus*, featuring graphic scenes of bloodshed, rape, mutilations, and death on stage, and Kyd's *The Spanish Tragedy*, where the character Hieronimo commits suicide after taking revenge to regain honour. The theme of madness arising from passion, rage, misery or unhealthy desire to break the limits set by gods, and permeating Seneca's tragedy *Hercules Furens*, served as a model for Jacobean dramatists, making them dwell upon possible causes of one's insanity:

> Is Hercules a truly great man, perhaps a portrait of the Stoic wise man, whose insanity is caused by a petty, jealous goddess? Or is he a man of outstanding ability who causes his own madness when he tries to exceed the limits of nature? Are the murders of the family the madness, or the result of a madness which had been developing for some time?" (Shelton, 1978, p. 58).

Thus, madness is portrayed as either the root or the consequence of evil actions.

The theme of supernatural, in its turn, was a "tradition received by Seneca from Greeks" (Cunliffe, 1965, p. 44), where the ghosts were influencing the flow of events. Hence, "when we remember that sensational horrors presented on the stage, the Ghost, and the Chorus are among the most striking features of Seneca" (Cunliffe, 1965, p. 46). In this connection, the ghost of Andrea populates the pages of *The Spanish Tragedy* and three apparitions in *Titus Andronicus*, Revenge, Murder and Rape, allow Titus to take vengeance on Tamora. Last but not least, the use of a tomb symbol is another prominent element of Seneca's plays, as

"Seneca envisions the tomb as an escape from worldly trouble, a memorial to the honoured dead, a locus where the past, present, and future intersect, a symbol that mocks human struggle and achievement" (Miola, 1992, p. 21). In addition to its metaphorical importance, the tomb appears as a setting, an amalgamation of life and death, and a place where problems of this world come to an end in the plays by Shakespeare and Seneca. Hence, in *Titus Andronicus* Andronici's tomb attests "two burials, one human sacrifice, one murder of a son by a father, armed rebellion, and royal treachery" (Miola, 1992, p. 21). To summarize, based on the canons laid out by Seneca, the most common pattern of Jacobean tragedies is the methodical repetition of the following elements: a violent crime or the covert murder of a law-abiding sovereign by a violent counterpart; an assassinated victim's eerie apparition to a younger relative; a time-span of mystery, secrecy, or conspiracy when the assassin and the vigilante conspire to harm one another; an outburst of general violence, usually carried out through a fictitious masquerade or festivity; and a catastrophe that usually results in the death of the dramatis personae, including the avenger.

Muriel Spark makes profound use of deconstructive parody in *Not to Disturb* in reference to John Webster's Jacobean tragedy *The Dutchess of Malfi* (1614). At the very onset of Spark's play the butler Lister dramatizes the approaching death of the Baron and Baroness Klopstock as if they were tragic heroes in Seneca's plays characterizing their life as "a general mist of error. Their death, a hideous storm of terror. I quote from *The Dutchess of Malfi* by Webster, an English dramatist of old" (Spark, 1971, p. 5). Multiple intertextual allusions of the sort symbolize Spark's intention to perform from the inside of the original genre of Jacobean tragedy in order to deconstruct its main conventions on both structural and thematic levels and to revitalize them through the process of laying bare their inadequacies by means of parody.

On the structural level the resemblance of *Not to Disturb* with the Jacobean drama is apparent in the subdivision of the novel into five parts:

> The "Exposition" part in which the events requiring vengeance are told; the "Anticipation" where the chief agent plans everything in detail for the revenge; the "Confrontation" part where the avenger and his intended victim meet; the "Partial Execution" part in which the avenger's plan occurs, and the final [part in which] the act of vengeance is completed (Salgado, 1969, p. 17).

Thus, in the first section of Spark's novel the desire of servants to take revenge on their masters in the library is attributed to the immoral love affair they are involved in. Yet, the inhuman indifference of the servants to the mortal act about to occur is as immoral and indecent as the love triangle parodied in the novel. Though confrontation and realization of vengeance do occur in the following sections, the sense of injustice remains due to the film-making process which Spark caricatures for its lack of ethics and morality. The act of avenging and punishment which is usually completed by the end of the novel is being deconstructed by Spark hinting at the absolute achievement of revenge at the very beginning of narration. Thus, Lister confuses the reader by saying that there is a "small

change compared to what is to come, or has already come, according as one's philosophy is temporal or eternal. To all intents and purposes, they're already dead although as a matter of banal fact, the night's business has still to accomplish itself" (Spark, 1971, p. 12). Hence, structural conventions of Jacobean tragedy are being reversed here for the sake of parody.

On the thematic level the sense of parody in *Not to Disturb* is accomplished through Spark's numerous comments on the corrupted values of Jacobean society, as well as its deterministic view of the universe, which she transmits onto the modern society ridden by problems of a similar sort. Thus, the 'violent crime' as the major element of Jacobean drama is committed in *Not to Disturb* because of the degrading and debauching behaviour of the victims epitomised in a degenerate love affair, which deserves retaliation. In a similar manner, the plot of *The Duchess of Malfi* starts as a romance, with the Duchess marrying a commoner, and terminates as a terrifying disaster, with her male siblings taking vengeance that leads to their untimely destruction. The character of the Reverend in *Not to Disturb* is trying to find a peaceful resolution for the degrading liaison involving Cecil and Cathy Klopstock, and Victor Passerat and to give them a moral lesson. Nonetheless, the absence of the three makes him suffice with reading aloud a newspaper cutting on the invention of a "new anti-sex drug" (Spark, 1971, p. 51) to the servants:

> I brought this for Cecil and Cathy Klopstock to see. I think it might have something in it to help them with their problems. I hope it will help you with yours, everyone of you. […] New anti-sex drug – that's the headline. Edinburgh, Scotland – medical science has come up with a drug that keeps sex offenders under control (Spark, 1971, p. 51).

Obviously, the Reverend seems to be disturbed by the depraved sexual habits of the household, and the society in general, yet he gets late with administering his restorative therapy, as the three are already mortally punished in the library. The servants' urge for avenge cannot justify the concurrent film-making process that they are involved in. In this way, Spark both mocks the ancient theme of vengeance, practiced to the extreme in the novel, and criticizes the world of artists in a degenerate society for their inhuman emotions and material interests, thus making them as iniquitous and corrupt as the deformed relationship of the two Klopstocks and Passerat.

As a deconstructive parody, *Not to Disturb* implicitly undermines the deterministic view of life events in Jacobean Drama. Spark's religious philosophy reflects her concerns with the limits of human freewill. In fact, the freewill of the characters in the process of attaining their aim is limited by the freewill of outside actors:

> As a Catholic [Spark] believes that beyond grim reality soars a spiritual idea; as a novelist she is aware that literary conventions generally determine the actions of various characters. Fiction is, traditionally, a deterministic form, yet Spark wishes to persuade the reader that life should not be taken for granted, as a fait accompli, as a matter of going through motions (Bold, 1986, p. 91).

Therefore, nothing can be foreseen before it entirely comes to an end and the agents' desires cannot be fulfilled as there is a greater will beyond theirs. In contrast to Webster's play, in which the lives of the two brothers are ruined in the attempt to rescue their sister the Dutchess and the inheritance, *Not to Disturb* ends with an unpredictable and unexpected phone call, which undermines the servants' plan in the novel:

> 'Could you repeat that, sir?' says a voice. Clovis pushes his way through a mass of shoulders and reaches Lister. 'Phone call from Brazil,' he says. 'The butler won't fetch Count Klopstock to the phone. Absolutely refuses. He's locked in the study with some friends and he's on no account to be disturbed' (Spark, 1971, p. 93).

This conversation is important not only because it informs the reader that similar events have been taking place in Brazil, but also because the presupposed plot of Swiss domestics are disturbed by those of the domestics residing in Brazil. At the same time, Spark deconstructs the vision of Jacobean drama "as semiethnographic texts in their representation of Catholic, Continental Europe or the Far East as fundamentally un-English, the site of depravity" (Schmitt, 1997, p. 2), which turns to be quite the opposite, as the set of identically deprave events are happening parallelly both in England and the exotic land of Brazil. Likewise, the phone call from Brazil serves as a reminder of "Spark's familiar view that anyone is idiotic to suppose he has foolproof outcomes figured out and that since we cannot make our plans, no sure plans can be" (Hynes, 1992, p. 249). To conclude, in *Not to Disturb* Muriel Spark acts from the inside of the original genre of Jacobean tragedy, which serves as a general framework for the novel, and deconstructs its main thematic conventions of vengeance and deterministic vision of art and life, so as to revitalize them through the process of laying bare their inadequacies by means of parody.

4. *NOT TO DISTURB* AS A DECONSTRUCTIVE PARODY OF THE GOTHIC NOVEL

As a literary genre the Gothic novel was at the peak of its popularity between 1764 and 1820, with the novels *The Castle of Otranto* (1764) by Horace Walpole and *Frankenstein; or, The Modern Prometheus* (1818) by Merry Shelley setting literary standards for the genre. Generally speaking, it may be viewed as a sign of a movement away from neoclassical principles of reason and order prevalent in the period of Enlightenment to the romantic faith in feeling and creative power. At the same time, the genre might be viewed as a sort of revival of sensibility against neoclassical norms, when "the great resources of fancy have been dammed up, by a strict adherence to common life" (Walpole, 1964, p. 7), exercised through fear as a particular tool to ignite emotional involvement either through maintaining the reader's interest through tension or distress, or confronting him directly with shocking or unsettling happenings. Montague Summers distinguishes between three types of Gothic novel: "(1) Sentimental-Gothic, utilizing ghosts and gloomy- castle atmosphere to enliven sentimental-domestic tales; (2) Terror-Gothic, the most nearly "pure" Gothic novel; (3) Historical-Gothic, in which the Gothic atmosphere is used in a

historical setting" (1938, p. 29). At the same time, one of the most glaring concerns of the Gothic novel is psychologising internal mental developments of its characters by displaying their reactions to straining or awful circumstances. Yet, as opposed to the sentimental works of fiction of the time, the heroes and heroines of the Gothic novel are not put through hardships just to display exquisite feelings, but to be taught that "we become the victims of our feelings, unless we can in some degree command them" (Radcliffe, 1966, p. 80). Seeking to engage the reader in an unfamiliar manner is another characteristic that sets the Gothic novel apart from other specimens of fiction of the time. The Gothic novel keeps the reader in suspense together with the protagonists, and there are innumerable attempts to shock, scare, and otherwise excite him, as opposed to the sentimental fiction of the era, focusing on pure enjoyment of fine sensations. Another prominent characteristic of the Gothic novel is supernaturalism exercised through the usage of ghost, mystery, decay, curse, death, heredity, madness and secret imagery throughout its plot, which appears to be a sufficient enough method for taking the story out of the real world, in order "to transfer from our inward nature a human interest and a semblance of truth sufficient to procure for these shadows of imagination that willing suspension of disbelief for the moment, which constitutes poetic faith" (Coleridge, 1965, p. 6). Rough landscapes, abandoned convents, medieval architecture, castles, darkness, and similar settings were a useful convention, a formula for creating the right literary effect. As a result, the chief elements of the Gothic novel can be summarized as follows: a perverse plot that creates a state of thrilling suspense in an unnatural setting that foster one to psychologise internal mental developments of the characters of the novel.

The stock combination of setting, unnatural character types and developments, as well as predictable suspense patterns gave rise to the overwhelming criticism of the genre of the Gothic novel, comparing it to the "'Magical Mirror' exhibited in London; where after viewing the charming delusion of grapes swelling into a blooming maturity, or faces angelically smiling, suddenly there appeared a most hideous skeleton's skull, distending its terrific jaws" (Disraeli, 1797, p. 197). The same line of reasoning may be observed in G.R. Thompson, pronouncing that "when the word Gothic is applied to literature it merely evokes images of ghosts, demons, trapdoors, castles" (1974, p. 1). Condemnatory comments of the kind were so numerous that even Samuel Taylor Coleridge joined the growing chorus of those hoping that Gothic fiction would soon come to an end, by saying that "we trust that the society will banish what good sense should have prevented; and that wearied with fiends, incomprehensible characters, murders, and subterranean dungeons, the public will learn with how little expense of thought or imagination this species of composition is manufactured" (Raysor, 1936, p. 369). Some critics went even further by claiming that it was necessary to read "tenth-rate fiction" (Tompkins, 1932, p. 45) so as to comprehend the sources of enjoyment it provided for its initial readers. The amalgamation of reasons discussed above encouraged Muriel Spark to deconstruct the thematic structure of the Gothic novel by parodying its major shortcomings in her novel *Not to Disturb*, dissecting it "just like a Frankenstein's monster, assembled out of the bits and pieces of the past, nonetheless longing to recover a lost wholeness" (Kilgour, 1995, p. 11).

To parallel Gothic conventions Muriel Spark builds *Not to Disturb* around a perverse plot, based on the desire of servants to capitalise on the death of their employers locked in a room notwithstanding the fact of their mutual awareness of the existing love triangle between the Baron, the Baroness, and their secretary Victor. Yet, the murderous act loses its gravity and ceases to strike terror into the hearts of readers as Spark deconstructs it by diminishing it to the act of filmmaking organized by the servants. At the same time, Spark parodies the form of narration prevalent in the majority of Gothic novels based on the use of the omniscient narrator, by taking the reader "into the communal servants' quarters, into the private quarters of this or that servant, into the porter's lodge, over a bit of the grounds, but not into the library" (Hynes, 1992, p. 155), and, thus, making him impotent to discover the truth about the events happening inside and creating the grounds for never-ending suspense. Similarly, not only the butler Lister seems to assume the role of God and seeks to exercise his omniscience over what will happen to the Baron, the Baroness and Victor, but also the servants, who help him to prearrange the death of their master and mistress by engaging themselves in writing memoirs, journalistic accounts and movie scripts based on their foreknowledge of a double murder and a suicide about to happen in the library. Traditionally, masters tend to confide secrets to their servants, allowing them into the privacy of their lives. This privileged position grants them permission to prophesy about their masters' future, and to master their masters. Spark parodies this acquisition of omniscience by servants over their masters' personal life through the words of the maid Eleanor, stating that "it is inevitable, they are going to die" (Spark, 1971, p. 27) as "it is Lister who decides" (Spark, 1971, p. 29), comparing the castle to "a solar system" (Spark, 1971, p. 14), puppeteered by Lister both in order and in chaos. Spark portrays Lister as the one who arranges everything without the intervention of fortune or fate, while the Baron and Baroness are depicted as the ones who "placed themselves into the realm of predestination" (1971, p. 37). Yet, Lister's God-like omniscience does not remain unshattered, as Spark deconstructs it by restoring the servants back to where they belong due to their erroneous assumption about the identity of the heir to the Klopstock fortune. Thus, Eugene informs Lister that "he in the attic inherits everything" (Spark, 1971, p. 38), while Lister replies that "I admit we were in error" (Spark, 1971, p. 67). Both Lister's omniscient foreknowledge and evident absence of it in some situations demonstrate Spark's intention to parody the Gothic conception that one cannot foresee and keep his fate under control due to the existence of some powerful and mysterious beings beyond human reason and control. In this connection Lister says, "what is to emerge must emerge" (Spark, 1971, p. 64), thus becoming aware of his inadequate omniscience.

What is more, *Not to Disturb* is not only a deconstructive parody of a perverse Gothic plot. At the same time, it serves as a novel about both plotting and plot-making. The common plotting inclinations of traditional servants are parodied in *Not to Disturb* through the character of Lister, who surpasses the stage of simple plotting by writing a scenario, a text within a text of Spark's novel, for the other characters to adhere to, restoring his omniscience once again, but this time at a completely different level of a fully-fledged author, turning what is happening in Klopstock's castle into a dramatical and theatrical

performance. In this way, Spark promotes her conviction of life being nothing but fiction, a "discursive site, a carnivalesque mode for representations of the fragmented subject" (Miles, 1993, p. 4), turning any identity into a discursively fabricated entity. As a consequence, Lister makes best use of his authorship by saying "they don't come into the story" (Spark, 1971, p. 31) when referring to his prohibition for the two friends of Victor to enter the castle. Clovis says that "I disconnected the back doorbell" (Spark, 1971, p. 24) to stop the visitors from entering the house. Not being given any role on stage by Lister, Victor's friends are, thus, disconnected from the text authored by Lister, notwithstanding the fact that they continue their existence on the pages of Spark's novel.

But most importantly, *Not to Disturb* provides a deconstructive parody of the position of servants in traditional Gothic texts by means of foregrounding the housekeepers and driving the masters into the backstage of the novel, by 'keeping' them in the library. In this connection, Lister boasts of their newly acquired position by stating that "the popular glossy magazines have replaced the servant's hall in modern society. Our position of privilege is unparalleled in history. The career of domestic service is the thing of the future" (Spark, 1971, p. 83). At the same time, Spark parodies the conventional image of a cunning servant in traditional Gothic novels by making Lister put on the mask of stupidity when Prince Eugene, seeing Lister in off-duty clothes tells him that he "talk[s] and look[s] like a Secretary of State" (1971, p. 36). Lister is fully aware of Prince Eugene's sarcastic tone, yet he is forced to accept his remark as a compliment. The same line of reasoning might be applied to deconstructing the image of articulateness of servants in traditional Gothic novels. Lister is a reflective, musing person, eager to philosophise on various subjects: "How like the death wish is to the life-urge! How urgently does an overwhelming obsession with life lead to suicide! Really, it's best to be half-awake and half-aware. That is the happiest stage" (Spark, 1971, p. 13). Nevertheless, ironically Lister does not follow what he preaches and adheres to formal type of speech even when Mr. McGuire records his life, making the latter say: "Make it more colloquial, Lister, […] Give it a conversational touch" (Spark, 1971, pp. 41-42).

Likewise, *Not to Disturb* provides a deconstructive parody of traditional ecclesiastical rigidity in Gothic texts through the character of the Reverend and his flexibility during the wedding ceremony of Heloise to the 'mad man in the attic'. Even though the Reverend always conducts weddings according to the Evangelical ceremony, when Eleanor protests that they must use the Book of Common Prayer for the occasion, the Reverend easily alters his decision: "Let me see the English book then […] I have it within my competence to make exceptions in a case like this" (Spark, 1971, p. 72). The religious wedding ceremony is parodied even further through Lister's ironical comment: "Irene, your skirt is too short, this is a ceremony" (Spark, 1971, p. 73). Similarly, the Reverend's riding a motorbike is contrasted to the Gothic image of a grave and sober clergyman.

At the same time, Muriel Spark parodies Gothic narratives about "forms of power and authority – literary, familial, political" (Heller, 1992, p. 9) aiming to form many of the socio-political norms about high culture, by embellishing the furnishings of servants'

quarters with decorations typical of masters' lodgings. Thus, Lister's bedroom is ornamented with the furniture he has taken from different parts of the castle: "an armchair of deep, olive green soft leather, which ageless and unworn, seems almost certainly to have come from another part of the house […] Lister's bed is narrow but spectacular with a well-preserved bushy bear-like fur cover which might have once covered the knees of an earlier Klopstock" (Spark, 1971, p. 41). What is more, Lister, together with other servants, plans to capitalize upon the decease of their masters by getting ownership of the castle, which "is more like a Swiss hotel, which you may be sure it will become" (Spark, 1971, p. 30). Servants in the novel are portrayed as greedy, opportunistic, and materialistic, which provides Spark with ample resources for parody. As a consequence, Heloise agrees to marry the lunatic in order to secure the inheritance; Miss Barton wants to marry her patient for the same reason. Similarly, Mr. Samuel with his photographs, Mr. McGuire with his tape-recording, and Clovis with his movie script, want to exploit the death of their owners. In this way, Spark deconstructs the customary view of the social structure and paints servants as social climbers.

Muriel Spark employs parody to deconstruct the themes of sexual repression and sexual exploitation typical of Gothic fiction, which was commonly populated with stories about a mad woman in the attic. To subvert the male domination of Gothic environment, Spark reverses this tradition by making a male character a lunatic, whose insanity and sexual luridness were originally caused by sexual repression that he underwent due to his untimely seclusion in the attic of the castle. At the same time, his character symbolises "the repressed sexual desire of a [male] member of the nobility" (Henessy, 1878, p. 51) in Gothic fiction. In this way, Spark's novel "turns into a "female impulse to struggle free from social and literary confinement through strategic redefinitions of self, art, and society" (Gilbert and Gubar, 1979, p. xii). Likewise, sex was a taboo subject in Gothic novels, compelling the authors to resort to writing about sex through symbolic expressions, situations, and codes. Muriel Spark, on the contrary, allows her characters to discuss freely the topics of sexual nature. Thus, the male lunatic plunges upon women, taking off his clothes to consummate in the midst of the wedding ceremony: "the patient's howls and trumpeting appear to be expressions of delight rather than pain, for he grins incessantly, his great eyes glittering with ecstatic gladness" (Spark, 1971, p. 74), as a result of which he "rips the whole zip-fastener from the stuff of his suit and exultantly dances out of the garment. Then, capering lustily, he pulls the mink coat off his wife's back, drags her into a corner and falls on top of her" (Spark, 1971, p. 80). Likewise, Heloise has no hesitations when speculating about her pregnancy and different possibilities with regards to the foetus' father, and boasting about her sexual encounters:

> 'Pablo is the father', says Heloise, patting her stomach.
>
> 'I wouldn't be so sure of that', Lister says.
>
> 'Well, it isn't the Baron', says Heloise.
>
> 'No, it isn't the Baron', says Lister.

> 'Nor me neither, Heloise', says Lister severely. 'I always took precautions the times I went with you'.
>
> 'There were one or two, visitors', says Heloise, reflectively. 'But it's day and night with Pablo when He's in the mood. After breakfast, even'. (Spark, 1971, pp. 6-8)

Thus, through Heloise's pregnancy Muriel Spark parodies the Gothic convention that maidservants often turn up to be pregnant, even though "sex [was] the forbidden word" (Spark, 1971, p. 11). In this connection, *Not to Disturb* is literally infested with references to sex. Thus, Mr. McGuire wants Heloise to "speak about [her] fantasies" (Spark, 1971, p. 56), while Miss Barton is biting the lunatics finger to sooth him. Contrary to the common idea that sexual desire finds its abode in the subconscious and rises to the surface in one's fantasies, Spark intentionally makes Heloise link her fantasies to fairy tales, by making an allusion to *Little Red Riding Hood*, which in its original folklore form, still unembellished by the Brothers Grimm in the epoch of Romanticism when the Gothic novel was at the peak of its popularity, is laden with sexual undertones: "Mr. McGuire kept saying, 'Speak out your fantasies', like that. I didn't know what the hell to say. I thought he meant a fairy story, so I started with *Little Red Riding Hood*, and Mr. McGuire said, 'That's great, Heloise!" (Spark, 1971, p. 56). In addition, Gothic fiction is permeated with indirect references to incest. Spark deconstructs this 'tradition' through Lister's dialogue with Eleanor: "Aunt to me though you are, would you marry me outside the Book of Common Prayer?" (Spark, 1971, p. 30). Lister proclaims that he is "enamoured to the brim with Eleanor" (Spark, 1971, p. 77).

It is not just through the servant imagery that Muriel Spark parodies the themes of sexual debauchery, but also through the representation of the Baroness and the Baron, whom Lister calls "a pornophile" (Spark, 1971, p. 76). Likewise, Theo claims that "I could have the Baroness if I want. Any minute of the hour. Any hour of the day" (Spark, 1971, p. 19). This outspoken obsession with sex makes the Reverend bring a newspaper cutting about an anti-sex drug for the Baron to read, as he finds the article "quite relevant with the practices that go on in this house" (Spark, 1971, p. 50). The Reverend's comment also serves as a means to parody the suppressed sexual urges of the clergy which are no less lecherous than those of their secular brethren. At the same time, when Heloise says that she had had an opportunity to sleep with Victor, Pablo's reply "Didn't we all?" (Spark, 1971, p. 11), implies that Victor might have been practicing both homosexualism and heterosexualism, the fact that accentuates Spark's parody of sexual exploitation of servants by their masters.

In addition, *Not to Disturb* applies parody to the motif of menacing dreams and prophesies recurrent in Gothic novels. It is through the character of Clara, who sees sinister dreams, that the atmosphere of the Gothic is being deconstructed. Thus, Clara exclaims: "I can feel it in the air, like electricity" (Spark, 1971, p. 15). Similarly, Clara cautions: "Something must be happening up there, I've felt it all week" (Spark, 1971, p. 20). Her husband does

not take her wife seriously by overlooking her endowment of intuitive vision, which, nevertheless, proves to be true when Lister cites Shakespeare' soliloquy: "We have been such staff as dreams are made on" (Spark, 1971, p. 86). Yet, it is not just Clara, but Heloise who possesses the power of intuition. Spark connects this potency to Heloise's state of pregnancy, which itself is a process made oblique by a veil of mystery. In Gothic fiction intuition is the foil of reason, represented in *Not to Disturb* by the butler Lister. Nevertheless, Spark portrays Lister's reason as somewhat insufficient with regards to the possibility to find solution to the mysterious events in the castle. Therefore, for this purpose, Lister's aptitude has to be accompanied by Heloise's intuition:

> 'I place the event at about 3 a.m.', says Lister.
>
> 'I would say 6 o'clock', says Heloise.
>
> 'You might be right', says Lister, 'Women in your condition are usually intuitive'. (Spark, 1971, p. 9)

Given the fact that in Gothic fiction women are frequently portrayed as irrational and lacking logic, Muriel Spark generates some contradictory instances to parody this fact. Thus, the handyman Pablo states: "You're thinking thoughts, Heloise" (Spark, 1971, p. 54), while the Baroness is being described as having "learnt to eat an orange with a little knife and fork without touching the orange" (Spark, 1971, p. 57). Similarly, on the first pages of the novel Eleanor complaints about carrots, that is a matter of no importance if compared to the gravity of the overall situation in the castle marked by "a serious matter on hand" (Spark, 1971, p. 8).

Yet, it is not just unnatural character types and their evolution, but also stock combinations of Gothic setting that are being parodied in the novel. For this reason, the concept of time is being deconstructed and loses significance as Spark makes meaningless the idea of the linear and chronological progression of events in Gothic novels, first, through the structure of the plot of the novel itself, secondly, through ridiculing the speech of the characters and, thirdly, through the interchangeable use of the tenses. The plot of the novel itself is the main element that parodies the concept of time, as the events that are supposed to happen in the future, be it the murder of the Baroness and Victor Passerat, or the suicide of the Baron, are known by the main characters form the very beginning. Hence, *Not to Disturb* does not progress toward an unknown resolution in the future, but backward from an outcome given from the very opening of the novel. This fact has been employed by Muriel Spark to deconstruct the concept of predestination, determining the flow of events before they happen, prevalent in Gothic fiction. In this connection, Lister's memoirs record future actions as if they have already happened, Clovis' script sets down events that are yet to occur, Heloise makes guesses about the possible time of the murder, while Clara sees nightmares that foretell bad events to come. Consequently, Lister states that, "they have placed themselves, unfortunately, within the realm of predestination" (Spark, 1971, p. 37). For this reason, in a world where the past, present and future are all intertwined, where

which is which is not really of consequence, and what will happen is already known, the concept of time gets devoid of its original meaning.

The second technique that is employed by Spark to parody the treatment of the concept of time in Gothic novels is the use of soliloquies, directly mocking the traditional perception of time. In this connection, Lister encourages the servants "not [to] split hairs between the past, present and future tenses" (Spark, 1971, p. 6), and "not [to] strain after the vulgar chronology" (Spark, 1971, p. 40), and, thus, declares a blatant disregard for time in the novel. For this reason, chronology becomes something vulgar, coarse and improper for the characters in the novel, while the distinction between the time periods becomes completely unnecessary.

Although *Not to Disturb* is written mostly in the present tense, which gives an illusion of the linear progression of events just like in the Gothic novel, the tenses in the characters' dialogues are used interchangeably and incongruously, just like in Lister's comment: "But as things turned out he didn't live to eat it. He'll be arriving soon" (Spark, 1971, p. 9), or the following proclamation about the Baron, the Baroness and Victor: "They will die of it, or rather, to all intents and purposes, have died" (Spark, 1971, p. 13). Tenses are the elements of the language that are used to represent time, and when they used incongruously, they lose their function and denotative power. Spark's deconstructive parody of the concept of time culminates in the following statement by Lister: "But what's done is about to be done and the future has come to pass" (Spark, 1971, p. 9). Lister is against the division of the eternal time into the temporal; hence, he prefers tenselessness and all-nowness. At the same time, he cannot avoid precise timekeeping of the traditional servant in Gothic fiction, which contributes to the parodic nature of the novel.

The concept of place in *Not to Disturb*, as an indispensable element of setting in any work of fiction, is also used by Muriel Spark to parody the Gothic atmosphere in the novel. The choice of Switzerland, in general, and the sheltered shores of Lake Geneva, in particular, as a stage for events in the novel, brings to the fore the Romantically Gothic atmosphere of a secluded escapist habitat mirroring the vices and discrepancies of the modern times:

> Switzerland impressionistically evokes international or extranational neutrality, Calvinistic theology, precision timekeeping. Switzerland is Byronically otherwhere to some, but also concretely here- and now- as are chocolate, toys, and numbered bank accounts. In some ways it suggests escape and relief from temporal Western concerns: in other ways it epitomizes all those concerns in protected microcosm. (Hynes, 1988, p. 155)

The chateau of the Baron and the Baroness remind the reader of the of an old Gothic castle where "the large, windowed wall of the servants' hall looks out on a gravelled courtyard and beyond that, the cold mountains, already lost in the early darkening of autumn" (Spark, 1971, p. 9). The castle-like depiction of the Klopstock house is recurrent in the novel. "The swirling great staircase with its filigree of Regency wrought-iron banisters" (Spark, 1971, p. 26) and the "parquet flooring that once belonged to a foreign king" (Spark, 1971, p. 28)

add to the mysterious image of a Gothic castle, which is reinforced even more by Lister's numerous comments, comparing its owners to living ghosts: "'They haunt the house', says Lister, 'Like insubstantial bodies, still alive'" (Spark, 1971, p. 23). Apart from the interior ambience of the Gothic castle, the external surroundings and the overall sinister mood of the novel are reminiscent of Gothic fiction. Dark, windy, and gloomy weather permeating the setting, is indicative of the overall Gothic mode of the novel: "The wind now whistles round the house and the remote shutters bang as another latent storm wakes up. Footsteps descend heavily and the occasional howl that accompanies them becomes; as it approaches, more like a trumpet call" (Spark, 1971, p. 73). Indeed, the fact that "the wind is high" (Spark, 1971, p. 12), "the sound of the lake-water lapping on the jetty and of the mountain-wind in the grandiose trees" (Spark, 1971, p. 32) and an "instant of quick lightening at the windows followed by a grumble of thunder" (Spark, 1971, p. 74) all suggest an air of looming disaster. Nevertheless, Muriel Spark displays a witty and deconstructive attitude towards the Gothic setting of the novel by deviating from the norms of the Gothic tradition. The 20th century world of cameras, tapes, microphones and food blenders and voice recorders clashes with the overtly Gothic setting:

> Mr. McGuire is plugging his wire into the wall. The reverend now looks over his glasses at the tape-recorder. 'What is that?' he says.
>
> 'It's the new electronic food-blender', says Lister. 'We're all computerized these days, Reverend. The personal touch is gone. We simply programme the meals.' (Spark, 1971, p. 50)

The use of the new machinery in the Gothic setting of the Klopstock chateau fulfils Spark's aim of parodic deconstruction of Gothic conventions.

To conclude, though Gothic fiction is said to represent a void between romanticism and neo-classicism, Gothic has been never defeated. It serves as a metaphor for the corruption and degradation that occur in every historical epoch. Always in tune with the anxieties of the era, the Gothic has served as a gauge for collective and somatic conditions in a society. Every century brings new social and cultural complexities, and those in charge of making rules aim to uphold the established moral and social structures. To prevent violence and sexuality from getting out of hand, the horror and fear of the Gothic genre are therefore getting modernized, reformed, and updated through the use of deconstructive parody just like in the novel *Not to Disturb* by Muriel Spark.

5. CONCLUSION

Since the beginning of the 20th century, the swift advancement and nearly all-encompassing availability of education and technology shielded many readers from the terrifying experiences of murders, ruthless feats of fate, cruel punishments, and instances of catharsis, as well as monsters, fiends, or horrifying ghosts, which were based in outdated superstitions. Similarly, the dominance of secularism rendered religious discourse in the genres of Jacobean drama and Gothic novel obsolete. Nevertheless, the new generation of

writers' experiments, Muriel Spark being no exception, with language and form provided an alternative method of evoking the eerie and tragic than relying on antiquated aesthetic cues. The Jacobean drama and Gothic novel were really a countercultural literary movement that opposed the staleness of the Age of Enlightenment literati, much as postmodernism opposes the mainstream realistic modes of expression today. Like the Jacobean and Gothic audience of the early 18th and 19th centuries was unnerved by the genres' exploitation of social taboos, the present-day reader is unnerved by the narrative games played by contemporary authors like Muriel Spark. Writing mostly in the Jacobean and Gothic-inspired murder investigation tale type, Spark shared the postmodernist aversion for didactically laden narratives and realism, since they were perceived as ineffective, and created her own unprecedented form of ironic commentary on the vices of modernity, which became to be known as deconstructive parody. A deconstructive parody can include a range of discourses inside its framework and is never restricted to a particular aesthetic work. Because of this, it can parody certain genres along with their corresponding forms and conventions on a structural level, and on a thematic level, the parodic mimicry is predicated on topics typical of these generic discourses. As a result, this article offered a thorough structural and thematic analysis of Muriel Spark's novel *Not to Disturb* as a deconstructive parody of the Gothic and Jacobean literary genres.

Statement of Research and Publication Ethics

In all processes of the article, the principles of research and publication ethics of the Manisa Celal Bayar Üniversitesi Journal of Social Sciences were followed.

Contribution Rates of Authors to the Article

The entire article was written by the author.

Declaration of Interest

The author has no conflict of interest with any person or organization.

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