

Muriel Spark
Aiding and Abetting
London: Penguin, 2001. Pp. 212. \$16.99
Reviewed by Nora Foster Stovel

Author and subject are perfectly matched in Spark's novel *Aiding and Abetting* (first publ. Viking, 2000). In the disappearance of Lucky, seventh Earl of Lucan, accused of the murder of his nanny, Sandra Rivett, and the attempted murder of his wife in 1974, Spark has found an ideal subject for her unusual talents. As Spark's narrator states, "the disappearance of Lucan partakes of the surrealistic realistic" (85). And so does Spark's novel.

Spark complicates the situation by giving Lucan a double, an impostor, thus raising issues of identity and imitation. Twenty-five years later, the changes wrought by a quarter of a century of ageing, augmented by plastic surgery, render police investigators' "identikit" difficult to identify. If either man were apprehended, he could claim to be the impostor. Spark gives the situation psychological ramifications by having Lucan and his double both seek the guidance of psychiatrist Hildegard Wolf in Paris. Wolf has theories about which man is the true "Lucky," but she cannot be sure—any more than the reader can. The situation is further complicated by the fact that Hildegard Wolf is herself an impostor. Born Beate Pappenheim, she has become the "Blessed Beate Pappenheim, the stigmatic of Munich" (28). Using her menstrual blood to simulate stigmata, she has posed as a female latter-day Christ. Miracles have been attributed to her, and funds have accrued by fraud. Thus both patient and doctor are bound together by blood—blood money—as each has the other over the proverbial barrel. They both offer the fascination that the abnormal mind affords for the normal. Spark's subject is perfectly suited to her matter-of-fact morbidity.

The problem is that, since the Lucan doubles have confessed to her, Wolf can be accused of "aiding and abetting," but she cannot spill the beans on them for fear that they will expose her fraud. Like Lucan, she "disappears," mystifying even her partner, Jean-Pierre Roget of Paris—just as she did her boyfriend Heinrich in Munich. The situation is enhanced by the fact that two amateur sleuths give chase to Lucky Lucan. Lacey, daughter of Maria Twickenham, an old friend of Lord Lucan, joins forces with another old friend, Joseph Murray, as they go on a romantic manhunt. Both Luckys travel the world, collecting funds from wealthy old friends. The problem here is that these old friends are dying off, leaving the Lucans in the lurch. Lacey aims not to capture Lord Lucan, but to write an account of his escapades, thus creating the requisite metafictionality for the novel, as she searches through old clippings for the facts of the case and photos of the accused.

Spark's subject lends itself perfectly to her distinctively realistic surrealism, as it builds to a bizarre conclusion. Her ironic ending is worthy of the brilliant British comic novelist Evelyn Waugh himself. *Aiding and Abetting* is detection with a difference.

Alfred Doebelin

Berlin Alexanderplatz. The Story of Franz Biberkopf

Trans. from the German by Eugene Jolas

New York: Continuum International, 2003. Pp. 635. \$25.95

Reviewed by Margaret Heukaeufer

In nine parts Alfred Doebelin (1878–1957) narrates the story of Franz Biberkopf, which takes place in Berlin in the 1920s. As Alexander Stephan says in the foreword to the novel—first published in Germany in 1929—it “ranks among the masterpieces of modern literature.”

This reprint of the 1961 English version of the novel could hardly have been translated by a person more competent and knowledgeable than Eugene Jolas. Jolas not only had first-hand experience of the hectic, yet fascinating life in big European cities, but he also knew James Joyce and edited his works, and was acquainted with many avant-garde writers of the 1920s. In addition, Jolas had ample experience as a translator and journalist, which enabled him to grasp the atmosphere of Berlin's underprivileged society in detailed descriptions as well as in dialogues, interior monologues, and general quotations. The latter in particular prove Jolas's thorough knowledge of both languages, as proverbs and word puns, being extremely difficult to transfer from one language into another, are very well captured and translated.

Worthwhile mentioning are a number of illustrations from Rainer Werner Fassbinder's film version of the novel, which are grouped in the center of the book, making this edition especially attractive. Due to the poor quality of the paper of the book, however, the film stills, unfortunately, are of poor quality as well.

When Alfred Doebelin wrote *Berlin Alexanderplatz. The Story of Franz Biberkopf* during the 1920s, he was still practicing medicine in a working-class area of Berlin, and thus had a thorough knowledge of the activities around Alexanderplatz. He also was acquainted with the prison director of the penitentiary Tegel, which he visited on several occasions. The novel proves Doebelin's strong interest in an authentic setting and his concern with a realistic picture of the acting characters, whose innermost feelings and emotions appear primarily through interior monologues, thus expressing the isolation in an