Muriel Spark – *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie*

Critical Essays

In the Great Tradition: *The Prime of Muriel Spark*

In this age of book clubs and television interviews and full-page advertisements, it is comforting (and perhaps snobbishly satisfying as well) to find now and then a writer who has made a reputation simply by being read and admired. Only five years have passed since Muriel Spark published her first novel, *The Comforters*, but that book, and the five she has written since then, have given her a status among younger British novelists as secure as anyone's.

No one who claims to be informed on the current state of fiction can afford to overlook her work. Her position in America is somewhat less established—two of her books are in paperbacks, but as far as I know she has not yet penetrated that innermost sanctum, the college curriculum—but her word-of-mouth reputation has already spread in a way that happens only to truly original, and pleasurable, writers.

Certainly original and pleasurable and the first things to say about Mrs. Spark's novels. Each is in its way unique—a new set of fictional problems, a new kind of plot-invention. She has that evident pleasure in the manipulation of her medium which distinguishes the master novelists from the journeymen. Yet in all of her books, for all their individual uniqueness, there is a uniformity of comic tone, of pace, and of attitude which defines an extraordinary personality and intelligence behind the work. The joy that she takes in the making of fictions, and the attractiveness of her creating mind, are two prime sources of the pleasure that her novels give; for it is a special kind of pleasure that we get from observing a finely creative imagination in the act of invention.

In a biographical note Mrs. Spark once listed her favourite recreations as "Chess and Disguise." There is something of both visible in her novels: a pleasure in intricately patterned plots, and a pleasure in the concealment of motives and meanings. Her novels are both mannered and mysterious, and this combination, along with her comic gifts and her rapid, economical style, makes her work what it is—examples of a new kind of novel.

Mrs. Spark is a Catholic convert, and this is a point of more than parochial interest. For one thing, her life as a novelist began with her conversion. Religion and creation are, by her own testimony, intimately related: she has found Catholicism "conducive to individuality, to finding one's own individual personal point of view." The theme of her first novel she described as "really a convert and a kind of psychic upheaval"; most of her subsequent work involves Catholic characters, and the problems which their Catholicism poses in a non-religious world.

But her writing is also religious in a more pervasive, less specific way; her reality includes the unseen, and her novels are peopled with diabolic characters (she has wisely avoided trafficking in her comedies with saints) and inscrutable forces which exercise mysterious powers over human activities. In *The Comforters*, for example, the heroine hears voices and clacking typewriters which seem to be composing a novel about her life as she lives it, and a demonic old servant vanishes and reappears before our eyes; in Memento Mori a number of old people receive inexplicable telephone calls reminding them that they must die; in The Ballad of Peckham Rye a devil called Dougal Douglas disrupts a working-class community for the sheer deviltry of it; in The Bachelors a dubious medium clearly communicates with the dead.

Mrs. Spark offers no comfortably secular explanation for any of these events; her stories are more likely to create mystery than to explicate it, and she is content to leave the supernatural that way—Mysterious. The world of human experience is complex, and not ultimately explicable; evil, her demons remind us, is as actual as nasty servants and telephone calls, and reality is odder than you think.

But evil may not be quite the right word to indicate the pervasive metaphysical presences that haunt Mrs. Spark's novels. She is not, like that other distinguished convert, Graham Greene, devil-ridden; the diabolic creatures who turn up in her books are more grotesque than terrifying, and their deeds are rather annoying than destroying. They are eccentrics, liars, meddlers, and bores—the kind of people who bring out the pettiness and uncharitableness in us, not the kind who lead us to damnation. The true metaphysical force is less precise than this, not clearly either evil or benign, but simply there, the author of the human story, the Comforter. To say that Mrs. Spark has chosen to write Catholic comedies does not explain her vision, but perhaps in a way it describes it.

It may strike a reader coming to these remarks without prior knowledge of Mrs. Spark's work that she must be not so much a comic writer as a clownish one. Certainly a summary of her plots would not be the best way to convince a sceptic of her essential seriousness. How, one might ask, can a novelist write seriously about religious experience in a plot like that of *The Comforters*? Voices? Typewriters? How ridiculous! Not at all. The theme of the book is the discovery, by an intelligent, sophisticated, slightly neurotic young woman, of the reality of the nonmaterial; this discovery finds spiritual expression in her conversion, and psychological expression in her breakdown. In the end we don't know who has operated the typewriter which Caroline Rose heard; the mystery has not been dissipated, but Caroline accepts and is comforted by the existence of an operator, and the book we read is the final evidence that what she heard was real.

"Fiction," Mrs. Spark has observed, "to me is a kind of parable." That is to say, it is beliefs shaped by the imagination. Her parables come from a Catholic imagination, but the truly creative imagination is a transforming one, and in Mrs. Spark's case, a comic one; her curiously conceited plots embody serious matters, but they are imaginative, not doctrinal, and her books are not likely to convert anyone (though they may well make a secular view of things seem rather bare and boring).

To say that fiction is "a kind of parable" is to suggest that one's interest should be on the design and meaning of the fable rather than on the customary objects of our attention in fiction—the empathetic character and the credible, detailed situation. In Mrs. Spark's novels this is so; her gift for intricate design is superb, her detachment from her characters absolute. The effect of this is a reduction in scale of individual characters (only one novel, Robinson, is a first-person narration, and this is the one novel that is clearly inferior to the others); her customary habit is to establish a number of more or less equally important characters, and then to compose a pattern around them, relating each to all the others. Individuals are likely to be treated more as "cases" (sometimes specifically medical or legal cases) than as personalities.

The character in Memento Mori who observes his fellow septuagenarians (virtually everyone in this remarkable novel is over 70) and records their reactions to old age in a card file is a kind of model of the way Mrs. Spark's mind works: "What were they sick, what did they die of?" this card-filer thinks. "Lettie Colston … comminuted fractures of the skull; Godfrey Colston, hypostatic pneumonia; Charmian Colston, uremia; Jean Taylor, myocardial degeneration …" And on through the list of his friends and coevals, coldly ticking them off. But Mrs. Spark adds: "Jean Taylor lingered for a time, employing her pain to magnify the Lord, and meditating sometimes confidingly upon Death, the first of the Four Last Things to be ever remembered."

Compassion is there, but Mrs. Spark's religion protects her from that too-easy compassion which we call sentimentality. She is neither cold nor soft-hearted; on the whole she is amiably disposed toward her characters, finds materials for comedy in them, and records their nastier qualities without rancour. She is not, as has been suggested, a satirist; her writing has neither the motive nor the tone of satire. If she is detached in her attitude toward her characters, this is understandable in a novelist who sees people in terms of the designs into which they fit (including the design of the Four Last Things).

One finds the same quality of detachment in Mrs. Spark's treatment of the physical world that her characters live in. There is about her novels a striking spareness in the description of sensory experience; people occasionally have sex lives, but none of them enjoy themselves—sex is at best a distracting temptation, at worst an abrasive emotional complication. The same is true of other pleasures of the flesh—food, drink, the natural world may compose the physical circumstances of a scene, but they are not dwelt on, and nobody savours them much. That this spareness is intended rather than a limitation of literary gifts the novels everywhere demonstrate; Mrs. Spark can make the physical world as concrete and emotive as she likes, on those occasions she likes.

Consider this passage, the last sentences of The Ballad of Peckham Rye: "But it was a sunny day for November, and, as he drove swiftly past the Rye, he saw the children playing there and the women coming home from work with their shopping-bags, the Rye for an instant looking like a cloud of green and gold, the people seeming to ride it, as you might say there was another world than this."

And so Mrs. Spark does say. Conversion seems to have seized her, as it sometimes does imaginative persons, with a kind of impatience with the material. The world of children and shopping-bags is all right for those who like it, but there is another world than this, a world of minds and souls, in which the really important human experiences take place.

Her episodes are therefore people talking, rather than people acting, or touching, or feeling, or even seeing. For this reason critics have quite rightly compared her work to that of Henry Green and Ivy Compton-Burnett; she is in the tradition of the intellectual novel, in which what matters is the play of ideas and experiences upon the mind, and the interplay of minds upon each other.

The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie, Mrs. Spark's new novel, is very much in this tradition. Like each of her previous novels, it is both a new departure and a continuation. It is different from the others in that it does without manifestations of the supernatural; it is similar in being intricately designed, and concerned with religious ideas.

Miss Brodie is a Scottish schoolmistress who dedicates her prime (for her, the years after 40) to the moulding of her students' lives and wills. They will be, she tells them, the crème (Miss Brodie is addicted to resounding clichés); and in the splendid, romantic lives that Miss Brodie plans for her disciples she will live vicariously a life more splendid than her own. She is a romantic idealist, of the authoritarian kind—one of her girls later remarks, "She's a born Fascist"—and the Brodie set under her powerful influence becomes a collective extension of her ego, "a body," one of them thinks, "with Miss Brodie for the head … in unified compliance to the destiny of Miss Brodie, as if God had willed them to birth for this purpose."

So long as Miss Brodie's plans for her girls are only fantasies, the girls are willing enough to be the "Brodie set." But when it becomes clear that she seriously intends that the prettiest girl in the set shall become a surrogate mistress of the man Miss Brodie loves, in order that Miss Brodie may vicariously enjoy him, then one of the girls "betrays" her ("betrays" in quotes because the meaning of personal loyalty and betrayal is one of the themes of the book), and the collective, willed destiny of the whole becomes the separate destinies of the individuals.

The novel is religious in two ways. As in many of Mrs. Spark's books, the principal observer and commentator, a girl called Sandy Stranger, is a Catholic convert; the theme of her own story is the theme of authority found and rejected, of Miss Brodie's power versus the power of the Church, and her education through the novel is an education in the meaning of authority. But it is also religious in its treatment of Miss Brodie. The setting of the novel is Edinburgh, and the spirit of Calvin broods over the action. Miss Brodie is an inverted expression of that spirit: "just as an excessive sense of guilt can drive to excessive action, so was Miss Brodie driven to it by an excessive lack of guilt."

The authority that Miss Brodie wields is a warped and egocentric predestinarianism, Calvinism without the religion: "She thinks she is Providence," Sandy observes, "she thinks she is the God of Calvin, she sees the beginning and the end." Out of this delusion arises the principal conflict of the novel, the conflict between Miss Brodie's notion of the girls as the instruments of her personal destiny, and the girls' natural, individual drives toward individual fulfilment.

Her attempt at playing Providence fails, as it must, and her girls desert her for the more attractive business of being themselves, but the force of her effort has had its effects, however ironically unlike her intentions. In the end a visitor asks Sandy, now a nun, "What were the main influences of your school days?" and she answers: "There was a Miss Jean Brodie in her prime."

There seems little left to say about the book by way of peroration. It is as good as anything Mrs. Spark has done and, as should be clear by now, that means to me that it is very good indeed. It is intelligent, witty, and beautifully constructed, and it is new—like her previous novels it is a fresh assault upon the limits of the novel form. Mrs. Spark's powers of invention are apparently inexhaustible, and these unique and impressive powers make her a novelist worth taking very seriously.

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The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie: Muriel Spark Bridges the Credibility Gap

Muriel Spark is certainly one of the most productive novelists writing today. Since 1957 she has published eight novels in addition to verse and short stories. Though all have received critical attention, amounting sometimes to little more than critical puzzlement, most interest has been paid neither to her first nor her latest fiction, but one of the central novels: *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie* (1962). For example, a few seasons ago it was adapted for the London stage, where it was a popular success, and it was subsequently made available to American audiences in New York City. It has most recently been made into a motion picture which has received approving critical notice.

Critics have not acclaimed *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie* as Muriel Spark's "masterpiece"; neither does the novel contain sensational depictions of sex or violence which would explain the attention it has been given. Indeed, the reasons for the notice received by this novel rather than Muriel Spark's other fiction are not immediately apparent. Reasons there are, however. And though they satisfy the curiosity of those who ponder such questions, they also enlighten more serious readers who seek answers to the puzzles posed by the author's imaginative, but sometimes thematically baffling, work. *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie*, occupying a central position in her novels to date, is the answer book to the earlier novels and a guidebook to those that follow. Dealing with the same questions (themes) as *The Comforters* (1957), *Robinson* (1958), *Memento Mori* (1958), *The Ballad of Peckham Rye* (1960), and *The Bachelors* (1961), *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie* moves away from the depiction of unbelievable supernatural forces and towards the embodiment of out-of-the-ordinary characteristics in quite credible characters. Bizarre, surprising, and imaginative her novels remain. But with *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie* Muriel Spark leaves the incredible world of invisible, chanting voices and untraceable telephone callers. Though she continues to sketch a world which is filled with demons and to imply that there is a vast reality which is not perceived by the ordinary man, the supernatural is no longer found outside the individual but within man himself. *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie* retains both the fun and seriousness which were so entertaining and confusing in the early novels, but it presents them in what is to most readers, more acceptable, believable, "realistic" form.

Muriel Spark's movement towards credibility is most apparent in the main character: Miss Jean Brodie. Though it is not difficult to imagine her walking the streets of Edinburgh or conducting a class in history, she does the same sort of things as the demoniac Dougal Douglas in The Ballad of Peckham Rye. Everyone who knows her recognizes her difference, yet she is undoubtedly real in an ordinary sense: "there was nothing outwardly odd about Miss Brodie. Inwardly was a different matter, and it remained to be seen, towards what extremities her nature worked her."

If Jean Taylor of Memento Mori meditates on the Four Last Things to be ever remembered, Miss Jean Brodie is concerned with those first things to be considered, for she is dealing with the young, those who are just beginning life. And she affects them in much the same, if less mysterious, way as the phone calls affect the aged in the author's earlier novel.

Miss Jean Brodie is set apart from ordinary people because she, in her prime, has come to realize the unity between the physical and spiritual sides of man’s nature. As she says, "I ought to know, because my prime has brought me instinct and insight, both." Instinct and insight apparently give one an extraordinary vision of the world, which would undoubtedly please Dougal Douglas of The Ballad of Peckham Rye. In fact, Miss Brodie seems to echo him when she says, "Where there is no vision, the people perish." Caroline Rose of *The Comforters* would certainly see the similarity between instinct and insight and the natural and supernatural orders which she comes to know. Miss Brodie, like other Muriel Spark characters who precede her, unifies the ordinary and extraordinary levels of reality, and demoniacally influences the lives of those around her. She is an ordinary school teacher in a quite ordinary school for girls, the Marcia Blaine School in Edinburgh, Scotland. But when she renounces the world and dedicates her prime to her girls, she manages, by most unusual and extraordinary means, to transfigure the commonplace. And indeed, The Transfiguration of the Commonplace is the title of the book eventually written by Sandy Stranger, Miss Brodie’s favourite pupil.

Most of the novel is concerned with Miss Brodie’s moulding of the girls as she gives them the benefit of her prime. By her unorthodox teaching methods she attempts to develop in each of them vision, a rich awareness of the enormity of the world and its possibilities. For instance, she teaches the history of World War I by telling the girls the story of Hugh, her lover, who was a soldier in that war. She teaches geography and history by describing her own vacations in Italy where she has seen Mussolini’s troops marching through the streets. She presents the subject matter, but she surrounds the facts with an atmosphere of adventure. By combining historical fact with personal reminiscence a sense of a multileveled reality existing and operating simultaneously is given by Miss Brodie to the girls. She urges them to define themselves not only in terms of the ordinary world but also in terms of the romance which accompanies it.

Miss Brodie’s relation to her students and to her peers, therefore, is perhaps best understood as a relation of the "whole" person in whom instinct and insight are united, to the "fragmented" person, who is deficient either in instinct or insight or both. She conceives of her purpose as a teacher to be that of leading her students toward their "prime," when instinct and insight might be united in a total life-gesture, and the personality might attain fulfilment. Miss Brodie’s explanation of her job is properly, if curiously, pedantic. She explains:

The word "education" comes from the root e from ex, out, and duco, I lead. It means a leading out. To me education is a leading out of what is already there in the pupil’s soul…. [My job] is a leading out of knowledge, and that is true education as is proved by the root meaning.

Miss Brodie deals with the inside of a person by cultivating his nature as a human being. She does not "thrust a lot of information into the pupil’s head" like other teachers. She deals with knowledge which is a part of the human makeup but which often lies unawakened and undisturbed. However, because she understands insight and instinct only in terms of her own experience, her girls tend to turn into images of her. And Teddy Lloyd, art teacher at the Marcia Blaine School, can only paint likenesses of her after coming into contact with her vision.

The measure of her success, then, is to be found in the effect she has on her students, the degree to which she energizes the components of instinct and insight, and the response which the students make to this educative process.

The means are as daring as her vision, as is seen, for instance, in her plans for Sandy Stranger and Rose Stanley, her "crème de la crème." Acting as dictator, Miss Brodie has educated each girl for a particular role. Faithful to her philosophy of education, she has not thrust these roles upon the girls, but has led out from them their particular ability. And when her plans are fulfilled, she, the representation of total vision, will stand back watching the various expressions of her vision acting and interacting in a visible re-creation of the whole. Miss Brodie is vision in its abstract (supernatural) form; Sandy, Rose, and Teddy Lloyd are vision in a physical (ordinary) form. As Sandy understands, they are "as a body with Miss Brodie for the head." Rose, who early in life is famous for sex, is to become the lover of Teddy Lloyd, the art master. Though Miss Brodie herself was once involved with him, she renounces him and leaves Rose, who in Miss Brodie's mind represents "instinct," to sleep with him. Sandy, on the other hand, is famous for her small, almost non-existent eyes. To Miss Brodie she represents "insight." Therefore, she is chosen by Miss Brodie to act as informant on the affair between Teddy Lloyd and Rose.

When the plan is made, Sandy is intrigued by it. "There was a whiff of sulphur about the idea which fascinated Sandy in her present mind." The sulphurous atmosphere and Miss Brodie's ethereal beauty at this time remind one that she is one of Muriel Spark's demons: forces, sometimes in human form and sometimes not, which exist simply to disrupt the ordinary and habitual, to confuse the traditional and acceptable, to blend the commonplace and the supernatural so that a person is forced to redefine himself in the context of an environment, or reality, filled with more possibilities than he had heretofore imagined. Their purpose is not to destroy or harm, though sometimes they do so. Neither is their purpose to please or to help, though they do that too. In short, their purpose is to "transfigure the commonplace." Miss Brodie's actions are particularly reminiscent of a Dougal Douglas. Ronald Bridges of The Bachelors might have described her as he did others, as little more than a creature of the air. She has made her exit from the stage of action and is simply directing the drama from the wings.

Eventually, however, Sandy rejects Miss Brodie. The irony lies in the fact that in rejecting her, Sandy re-creates her. In an attempt to destroy her, she becomes her. Sandy first tries to destroy Miss Brodie's plan for Rose and Teddy Lloyd to become lovers. She does so by sleeping with Teddy Lloyd herself, thus coming to represent, like Miss Brodie, the union of insight and instinct. Rose happily relinquishes her role, for without insight she has not understood Miss Brodie's plan. The author tells us that she "made a good marriage soon after she left school. She shook off Miss Brodie's influence as a dog shakes pond-water from its coat."

But Sandy has understood toward what extremities Miss Brodie's nature worked; and her understanding that Miss Brodie stands outside of ordinary reality and attempts to direct the lives of others causes Sandy to rebel. "'She thinks she is Providence,' thought Sandy, 'she thinks she is the God of Calvin, she sees the beginning and the end.'" Sandy, unlike Caroline Rose in *The Comforters*, finds no comfort in being simultaneously freed from ordinary restraints and controlled by extraordinary forces. She does recognize that Miss Brodie's influence is a liberating one, however. She later realizes that the "creeping vision of disorder" that she received from Miss Brodie "had not been without its beneficent and enlarging effects." Unlike Caroline, who accepts, Sandy rejects—or tries to. In a second effort to reject Miss Brodie Sandy goes to Miss Mackay and accuses Miss Brodie of being a fascist, which is her way of saying that Miss Brodie has tried to control and dictate the lives of all her set. Miss Brodie, who has been an admirer of Mussolini, is removed from her position at Marcia Blaine School.

The third step in Sandy's rebellion is her renunciation of the world by becoming a nun. Miss Brodie is horrified by the act, since she is no admirer of Roman Catholics, though "she was by temperament suited only to the Roman Catholic Church." She does not realize that Sandy has closely followed her own course. Both Miss Brodie and Sandy withdraw from the world and give of their experience and knowledge, their vision, to others. Miss Brodie devotes her prime to her set; Sandy gives to the world her widely acclaimed book, The Transfiguration of the Commonplace, a treatise on the nature of moral perception. Sister Helena of the Transfiguration, as Sandy comes to be known, seems eventually to realize that she has become another Miss Brodie, for she says that the main influence in her life was "Miss Jean Brodie in her prime."

Sister Helena is not a nun at peace with the world, for the knowledge that by her betrayal she simply replaced Miss Brodie rather than destroyed her does not bring tranquillity. Even the book, which visitors often come to discuss, she finds difficult to talk about, for it is, apparently, a study of Miss Brodie's "vision." Miss Brodie was right when she said, "Give me a girl at an impressionable age, and she is mine for life."

Miss Brodie's success with Sandy and the other girls is demonstrated when in retrospect they come to understand what she was teaching them. Sandy, for example, realizes that the world she was introduced to as a child was not the one others saw. "And many times throughout her life Sandy knew with a shock, when speaking to people whose childhood had been in Edinburgh, that there were other people's Edinburghs which were quite different from hers, and with which she held only the names of districts and streets and monuments in common." One of her visitors at the convent describes the Edinburgh he knew as a child as cold and grey and his teachers as "supercilious Englishmen, or near-Englishmen,... with third-rate degrees." Sandy could not remember ever having questioned the quality of her teachers' degrees, and the school had always been "lit with the sun or, in winter, with a pearly north light." That city, so dreary and so ordinary to many, was not so to Sandy as a child. She remembers later how "dark heavy Edinburgh itself could suddenly be changed into a floating city when the light was a special pearly white and fell upon one of the gracefully fashioned streets." For Sandy the commonplace was transfigured.

Eunice Gardner, to whom Miss Brodie once said, "You are an Ariel," describes Miss Brodie to Sister Helena as "marvellous fun ... when she was in her prime." When her stories about Miss Brodie cause her doctor husband to remark that her upbringing had been rather peculiar, Eunice protests, "But she wasn't mad. She was as sane as anything. She knew exactly what she was doing." And if Dougal

Douglas is right that "vision is the first requisite of sanity," then Miss Brodie is quite sane.

Jenny Gray, Sandy's best friend, is suddenly reminded of her days as one of the Brodie set when years later she is standing outside a famous building in Rome and is "surprised by a reawakening of that same buoyant and airy discovery of sex, a total sensation which it was impossible to say was physical or mental, only that it contained the lost and guileless delight of her eleventh year." The significance of the remembrance is not primarily sexual; it is that she recalls the unified vision of physical and spiritual worlds which she found with Miss Brodie, a vision which made life vibrant and rich and exciting.

But vision is not always possible. Monica Douglas, for example, is famous in the Brodie set for being able to do mathematics in her head. Also, she is easily angered. Miss Brodie objects to Monica's lack of spiritual insight and never makes her one of her favourites. Miss Brodie explains, "that's why she has a bad temper, she understands nothing but signs and symbols and calculations. Nothing infuriates people more than their own lack of spiritual insight…." Miss Brodie's assumption is borne out by Monica's later difficulties with her scientist husband. In a fit of anger she throws a live coal at his sister, and the scientist demands a separation.

Unfortunately, Miss Brodie's opinion of Mary Macgregor also proves to be accurate. Miss Brodie describes her as a silent lump, for she is stupid and unfeeling. She lacks both insight and instinct. Mary never comprehends the world she faces and is totally unequipped to deal with it. For example, when graduated to the Senior school, she does surprisingly well at reading Caesar's Gallic Wars until someone explains to her that Latin is not a form of shorthand. She meets death in the same kind of baffled way. Caught in a hallway into which fire is advancing from either end, Mary is unable to find an exit and runs from one fire to the other, distraught and confused. Mary is the epitome of the person who has no vision at all and is, therefore, totally controlled by the forces around her. Due to her lack of insight and instinct, she can never sense the richness of life nor deal with its complexities, for she perceives such a small bit of it.

One of Miss Brodie's fellow teachers at the Marcia Blaine School represents another form of the visionless life. Miss Gaunt, as her name implies, is a sharp, strict, practical, cold, and altogether horrifying person. She has intelligence, which Mary Macgregor has not, but she has long since renounced anything which has to do with the physical side of life. Muriel Spark states that "Her head was very large and bony. Her chest was a slight bulge flattened by a bust bodice, and her jersey was a dark forbidding green." She is a strict Calvinist, and the reader feels that the heavy and forbidding image of Edinburgh always looms menacingly in Miss Gaunt's background, in contrast to the lovely floating city it becomes with the presence of Miss Brodie. Miss Gaunt deals effectively, industriously, and unimaginatively with reality. She faces life grimly and determinedly. She has some degree of insight, but she does not recognize the breadth of life which Miss Brodie does, for she has no instinct whatsoever. Consequently, her life is like her name: gaunt.

Teddy Lloyd, on the other hand, has a great deal of instinct but insufficient insight to become the painter and the man that he would like to be. His instinct is evident in his sensuality, the basis of his art and perhaps of his life. His affair with Sandy fulfils her personality, for afterwards she represents not only insight but also instinct. In reverse, Sandy tries to give him the insight he lacks, but she fails. When more and more of his portraits begin to look like Miss Brodie, she tells him, "Why are you obsessed with that woman? Can't you see she's ridiculous?" He refuses to listen, and his vision is incomplete, just as his body is incomplete (he has only one arm). As a half-personality he cannot rebel as Sandy eventually does. He can only go on painting Miss Brodies, never doing the painting which would make a statement comparable to Sandy's Transfiguration of the Commonplace.

The design of *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie* differs somewhat from that of Muriel Spark's previous novels. Once again she creates a group of diverse individuals who are presented with the same problem, but who react to it in different ways. But in contrast to the preceding novels, *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie* does not show the characters developing in an uninterrupted line from a point where their lives are dull and ordinary, to an encounter with an extraordinary, sometimes incredible, event, to an existence either characterized by a heightened awareness of oneself and the world or a shocking diminution of life. Instead, early in the novel the girls of the Brodie set are shown to the reader as they eventually come to be. By a complex handling of time the author simultaneously creates two images of the girls. We see them in their prime and we see them creating it.

The point of view is, in effect, a double perspective. Miss Brodie, in her prime, tells the set about her past in order to give them vision. The girls in their prime look back at their past associations with Miss Brodie. By drawing an analogy between the girls and Miss Brodie, the author's theme is "vision" itself. She offers the reader a statement about the nature of reality by depicting a commonplace situation as it is transfigured by a supernatural figure. Miss Brodie offers her set vision by colouring the ordinary facts she teaches by the force of her own extraordinary personality.

The parallel between teacher and student resembles the relationship between the voices and typewriter of *The Comforters* and Caroline, about whom they are writing. The voices give her vision by putting her into a novel. Later she too writes a book in which she records what she has learned—i.e., her vision. Similarly, Muriel Spark's theme in *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie* is Miss Brodie's vision. In turn, Miss Brodie is shown relating her somewhat limited vision by teaching her set, and finally Sandy incorporates her broader vision in The Transfiguration of the Commonplace.

In two earlier novels Muriel Spark has jumped ahead in time to show the final result of certain bizarre events. In Robinson January Marlow is shown safely returned to Chelsea before the reader knows what she has experienced. In The Ballad of Peckham Rye the interrupted wedding of Humphrey Place and Dixie Morse begins the novel, and the reader is told that the cancellation is due to Dougal Douglas, though he has not yet entered the narrative. The structural device of disordering the chronology of events becomes far more complex in *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie*. By choosing to treat the plot in such a manner, the author seems to suggest that the influence of the supernatural does not spend itself in one incredible event, but that it surrounds an individual throughout his lifetime. In *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie* the reader sees what the girls become as well as how they began. In the design of the novel, one observes the gap between the two states-of-being lessen and, ultimately, close. The unremitting influence of the supernatural, in this case Miss Jean Brodie, is underscored by the inexorable movement of the plot to an already announced end, "towards what extremities her nature worked her," and the ambiguities of Sandy's response to the demoniac teacher.

Just as Caroline struggles against the pre-determination of her life by the mysterious voices in *The Comforters,* so Sandy Stranger rebels against a quite visible Miss Brodie and her effort to dominate Sandy's future as well as her present. She refers to Miss Brodie as a fascist, meaning that the latter insists upon being a dictator. Finally it occurs to Sandy that Miss Brodie has made the mistake of seeing herself not just as another Mussolini, but as God himself. She sets herself up as Providence, directing, controlling, shaping the girls. Ultimately she assumes the power of life and death over them, and she sends Joyce Emily to Spain to fight in the Civil War. Sandy realizes that when Miss Brodie places herself in such a position, she limits what is possible. She limits potential reality. She narrows the world of her girls when she makes herself the most complete expression of that world. Indeed, Sandy eventually realizes that Miss Brodie is not Providence; she is not the God of Calvin; she does not see the beginning and the end. And she recognizes Miss Brodie's "defective sense of self-criticism," which can be called an "excessive lack of guilt," as Samuel Hynes refers to it in "The Prime of Muriel Spark," Commonweal, February 16, 1962. Thus, Sandy must reject Miss Brodie, for it becomes evident that even Miss Brodie is incomplete. Sandy's own insight and instinct, plus the benefit of Miss Brodie's prime, ironically give her a perception of a reality far more extensive than Miss Brodie's, broad as it is. Therefore, Sandy removes her allegiance from Miss Brodie and gives it to God by becoming a nun.

But Sandy's new allegiance fails to bring peace and tranquillity as the reader might expect it to.

She clutched the bars of the grille as if she wanted to escape from the dim parlour beyond, for she was not composed like the other nuns who sat, when they received their rare visitors, well back in the darkness with folded hands. But Sandy always leaned forward and peered, clutching the bars with both hands, and the other sisters remarked it and said that Sister Helena had too much to bear from the world since she had published her psychological book which was so unexpectedly famed.

Indeed, she does have much to bear from the world, but it is not fame that disturbs her. It is vision itself. Just as Ronald Bridges suffers intensely as his understanding of the nature of the world grows, so Sandy the nun realizes with a measure of distress the extent of the goodness and evil in this world and other worlds. Her insight and her instinct, given to her from birth, but nourished and developed either by Miss Brodie or in reaction against her, combine in Sandy to give her vision, which simultaneously disturbs and consoles. Certainly it transfigures for her the commonplace. Thus Sandy Stranger, who was a stranger in this world until she grew in understanding of reality, becomes Sister Helena of the Transfiguration.

"*The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie*: Muriel Spark Bridges the Credibility Gap," in Arizona Quarterly, Vol. 25, No. 3, 1969, pp. 217-28.

"*The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie* Spark, Muriel: Ann B. Dobie (essay date 1969)." Contemporary Literary Criticism. Ed. Brigham Narins. Vol. 94. Thomson Gale, 1997. eNotes.com. 2006. 29 Oct, 2006 <http://lit.enotes.com/contemporary-literary-criticism/prime-miss-jean-brodie-spark-muriel/ann-b-dobie-essay-date-1969>

Muriel Spark’s Portrait of the Artist as a Young Girl

It was with a sense of relief that Muriel Spark enthusiasts greeted *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie*, for here at last was the concretely real uncluttered by the mysteriously occult, the supernatural, the fantastic. *The Comforters* had been one of the most puzzling of first novels; one was not altogether sure what to make of it. Robinson was almost equally puzzling, though not as complex. Memento Mori with its social and psychological realism was absolutely lucid by comparison, notwithstanding the identity of its mysterious caller. But with The Ballad of Peckham Rye and The Bachelors readers were once again confronted with Mrs. Spark playing fast and loose with the empirical world. It was easy enough to believe with Humphry Place in The Ballad of Peckham Rye that "there was another world than this." But how could that other world be reconciled with this concrete one within the form of a single novel? It was as if Mrs. Spark were asking the reader to assent to the literalness of inexplicable supernatural events, while at the same time the novels’ purely naturalistic levels seemed to make such an assent impossible. The result was an uneasy feeling that Mrs. Spark’s two worlds kept cancelling each other out. Among other novels, The Bachelors offers a good example of this phenomenon. While the reader is apparently being asked to believe that a benign God, a "vigilant manipulator" as he is called in the novel, is instrumental in the punishment of Patrick Seton, the agonized existential meditations of Ronald Bridges have such an authentic ring to them that the reader finds it very difficult to resist them or deny their validity.

It was with some sense of relief, then, that *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie* was greeted, for here was not the impossible demand of assimilating the supernatural in a realistic context. Moreover, in the title of Sister Helena’s famous treatise on the nature of "moral perception," many critics seemed to find the key to Muriel Spark’s past performances—"The Transformation of the Commonplace." However, as neat as that phrase may be, it does not clarify Mrs. Spark’s fictional practices. At most it indicates that her protagonists acquire a growing awareness of themselves in relation to the world around them. But the notion of the "developing character" is certainly nothing new in fiction, certainly nothing unique with Mrs. Spark. Nor does the transformation-of-the-commonplace approach to her fiction even help to explain the novel in which the phrase appeared. Some years ago, Josephine Jacobsen, in "A Catholic Quartet," Christian Scholar, 67 (1964), attempted to do just that in an appraisal that seems strangely out of keeping with the tone of the novel itself: "After the maiming exposure to Miss Brodie’s ego, which, under the banner of Truth, Freedom and Beauty, has disclosed itself in cruelty, stupidity and ravaging egotism, Sandy comes to feel that what is essential is to see the commonplace in light of grace. The commonplace unilluminated is stifling; the fabrications of the ego are cruel and basically stupid; but by transfiguration, the materials of the commonplace come into their proper radiance." Transfiguring in the light of grace the materials of the commonplace into their "proper radiance" does not seem a conclusion that one can come to about *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie*, especially when one considers that in the Church Sandy Stranger found "fascists" far worse than Jean Brodie, and especially when one considers that at novel’s conclusion Sister Helena is left clutching the bars of her grille "more desperately than ever."

This essentially religious, transformation-of-the-commonplace explanation does not explain, for the novel leaves totally undeveloped the nature of Sandy Stranger's conversion. Moreover, when one attempts to supply the novel with the ostensible religious significance that in fact is lacking, one must conclude that while Jean Brodie is a free-wheeling Justified Sinner in the tradition of Calvinist mythology, Sandy Stranger is, ironically, a child after John Calvin's own heart. Karl Miller, himself a native of Edinburgh, made this point in his review of the novel in The New Statesman, November 3, 1961. In seeming to credit Sandy "with exactly 'the sense of joy and salvation' the dangers of which have already been expounded," says Miller, the reader is confronted with a "nasty surprise which makes the author seem to slide back before our eyes into antinomian Calvinism, a justified sinner with the sourness and solipsism of her kind." Mr. Miller consequently concludes: "Catholicism is queer in Edinburgh, but it can't be as queer as that." More recently, in the most extensive article to date on *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie* ["The Uses and Abuses of Omniscience: Method and Meaning in Muriel Spark's *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie*," Critical Quarterly (Autumn 1970)], David Lodge offers another religious explanation (though also partly "novelistic") in an attempt to explain Sandy Stranger's enigmatic motives. He says that the novel's "assessment of Miss Brodie is, in the last analysis, an ethical and theological matter." Professor Lodge says, in effect, that Miss Brodie is punished for playing God, for creating myths out of all her fictions, in contrast to Sandy, who, in her growing moral awareness has learned the difference between "fiction" and "truth." Though Professor Lodge's conclusions are questionable, for reasons which I will develop in due course, he is the only critic I can recall who has noted that Sandy Stranger's "moral perceptiveness" was intended by Mrs. Spark to be ironic. This is a very important point, one that helps considerably to clear up some of the puzzles of *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie*. If Professor Lodge had followed through on this point, one thinks that he might have come to different conclusions.

Another recent commentator, Ann Dobie, says [in "*The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie*: Muriel Spark Bridges the Credibility Gap," Arizona Quarterly (1969)] that the theme of the novel is "vision itself," a vision that serves to "transfigure the commonplace" by providing Sandy Stranger with a knowledge of the inextricable mixture in this world of good and evil. According to Miss Dobie, Sandy has acquired this vision, "which simultaneously disturbs and consoles," from Jean Brodie. As far as it goes, this idea is true, of course, provided one insists that the principle of evil is no less active in Sandy Stranger than it is in Jean Brodie; for if as a result of a growing moral awareness Sandy determined to punish Miss Brodie for playing God, it is obvious that Sandy herself is guilty of the same transgression. Indeed, Sandy Stranger is in the long line of moral blackmailers to be found in Muriel Spark's novels, whose motives on close examination turn out to be very private and essentially malicious, not as moral or religious as they pretend to be. The evidence in *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie* indicates that Mrs. Spark was fully aware of Sandy's duplicity.

The attempt to assign "real" motives in the novel is a game of almost endless speculation, and serves mainly to point up the novel's central "failure." I put the word in quotes because I suggest that to read *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie* as if it were a work of psychological realism is to necessarily miss its real significance. True enough, in its realistic technique the novel seems to demand such a reading; but every attempt in this direction requires a great deal of explaining in order to accommodate the novel's apparent gaps and obvious ambiguities. I suggest that readers were misled primarily because Mrs. Spark's usual occult and supernatural paraphernalia were missing from *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie*. Readers failed to notice, it seems, that in this novel Mrs. Spark was employing an even more characteristic technique: namely the novel as parable and allegory. She was also indulging her sense of humour to such subtle effect, it seems, that few saw Sandy Stranger as a comic figure. The movie version of *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie* may attest to the fact that the novel was taken far too seriously. In fact, the novel was an extended joke, a joke directed at Muriel Spark herself. Its final effect is ambivalent, no doubt, but not ambiguous once its point is seen.

In an Atlantic Monthly review of The Mandelbaum Gate Frank Kermode wrote: "The suggestion is, in Mrs. Spark's novels, that a genuine relation exists between the forms of fiction and the forms of the world, between the novelist's creation and God's." Consequently, he says that all of her novels "are in a sense novels about the novel, inquiries into the relation between fiction and truth." If there were no other evidence available (and there happens to be considerable), Mrs. Spark's first novel, *The Comforters*, amply attests to the fact that she was extremely interested in the question of how a work of fiction, which is essentially a "lie," can be a vehicle for the truth. The answer is relatively simple, though no doubt philosophically profound: a fiction is true in the same way that the parables of Christ were true. Mrs. Spark wrote in Twentieth Century, 170 (1961) "Fiction to me is a kind of parable. You have got to make up your mind it's not true. Some kind of truth emerges from it, but it's not fact." In other words, as Aristotle responded to Plato, a universal truth is no less true because it is not particular. As for allegories, Mrs. Spark had already written a blatant one, Robinson, as well as the partially allegorical The Ballad of Peckham Rye. Indeed, from one perspective the whole of *The Comforters* itself was an allegory of free will versus determinism. Up to and including the writing of *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie*, therefore, there is sufficient evidence to believe that Mrs. Spark seldom conceived of characters and events as "real"; they are instead, for the most part, emblematic of the abstract ideas, the universal truths, that are the occasion of her novels. She once said in an interview: "I keep in my mind specifically that what I am writing is fiction because I am interested in truth—absolute truth." One of the major purposes of *The Comforters* was to illustrate how fictional forms could express absolute truths. The evidence from several novels, including *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie*, seems clearly to suggest that Mrs. Spark was never convinced that she was the truth-teller as novelist that she wanted to be. To simplify for the moment, it can be said that *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie* was written to examine once again the relation between fiction and truth, though not as profoundly as it had been examined in *The Comforters* or even in The Ballad of Peckham Rye, for that matter.

It is more complicated than this, however, for a remarkable thing about Mrs. Spark is that whenever she deals with this particular question, she almost inevitably considers the problems of Catholic belief and Freudian myths. There is a sense in which nearly all of her novels are "about" these three subjects in greater or lesser degree. But they are seldom treated separately; instead they are inseparably linked and interrelated in a single intellectual-aesthetic construct. Consider *The Comforters*, for example: clearly the novel is about the relation between fiction and truth; it is just as clearly a novel about coming to terms with the problems of Catholic beliefs; and though the nature of Caroline Rose's neurosis is not made very clear (it would be explicit in Robinson), there are sufficient clues in the novel to suggest that it is primarily sexual, the most singular one being the necessity of Caroline's physically touching the loathsome carnality of Mrs. Hogg in the climatic drowning episode. Mrs. Spark's three "subjects," as it were (novelistic, religious, Freudian), are almost perfectly balanced in *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie*. It is no wonder, then, that many readers have thought of it primarily as a religious novel, while others have considered it essentially a realistic character study. But no one as yet has fully noticed that its major perspective is "novelistic." Professor Lodge has come the closest to this understanding, but he was unfortunately waylaid by asking the wrong question: namely, what is supposed to be the reader's final judgment of Jean Brodie's character? Such a question assumes that the novel is a realistic character study. I suggest instead that *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie* is a parable, and a highly autobiographical one, of the artist as a young girl. Further, it seems that in this novel at least, Mrs. Spark believes that any creator of fiction who claims to be a truth-teller is being absurdly even dangerously, pretentious.

In the combined characters of Jean Brodie and Sandy Stranger, Mrs. Spark made what is perhaps her most public confession, so to speak, of herself both as person and as novelist. I think that Charles Hoyt was correct [in "Muriel Spark: The Surrealist Jane Austen," in Contemporary British Novelist, edited by Charles Shapiro, 1965] when he wrote of this novel: "Surely, the conflict which gives the book its special character, so enigmatic, so wryly amusing and yet profound, is that of Mrs. Spark's own life." He concludes: "Miss Jean Brodie is Muriel Spark's clearest conception of herself to the present and Sandy Stranger her best insight into her most dangerous and self-destructive tendencies." Jean Brodie and Sandy Stranger are not "real" characters in a realistic novel, then; they are allegorical figures in Mrs. Spark's self-portrait, a portrait of the artist as a young girl.

In *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie* there are three "artists," none of whom ever tells the truth, but each of whom is deluded into believing that he does so. Each of them practices an artistic "economy" (one of Mrs. Spark's most cherished practices) that serves only to distort reality, to make it impossible to ever perceive the truth. The most obvious example of such distortion is to be seen in the portraits of Teddy Lloyd, the one-armed painter (a Freudian joke?). No matter whom he paints, the finished product always looks like Jean Brodie:

Sandy was fascinated by the economy of Teddy Lloyd's method, as she had been four years earlier by Miss Brodie's variation of her love story, when she had attached to her first war-time lover the attributes of the art master and the singing master who had then newly entered her orbit. Teddy Lloyd's method of presentation was similar, it was economical, and it always seemed afterwards to Sandy that where there was a choice of various courses, the most economical was the best, and that the course to be taken was the most expedient and most suitable at the time for all the objects in hand. She acted on this principle when the time came for her to betray Miss Brodie.

Four years earlier, when Miss Brodie had begun to fictionalize the great love of her life by enlarging it with real incidents out of her present experience, "Sandy was fascinated by this method of making patterns with facts, and was divided between her admiration for the technique and the personal need to prove Miss

Brodie guilty of misconduct." (It may be interesting to note that Dougal Douglas employed the same technique in his fictionalized biography of Maria Cheeseman, but with an important difference: all of Dougal's fictions turn out to be surprisingly true in principle if not in fact.) Years later when Miss Brodie tells Sandy about her affair with Gordon Lowther, the singing master, she concludes by saying, "Well, as I say, that is the whole story." But "Sandy was thinking of something else. She was thinking that it was not the whole story." Nor was it, of course, for Jean Brodie was such an inveterate fictionalizer and so solipsistic in the extremity of her supreme egotism that she was simply out of touch with reality. One of the consistent ironies of the novel is that while Miss Brodie sets great store by "vision," she herself is totally lacking in that attribute. Not only does she fail to discover who betrayed her, she fails miserably to assess the moral implication of Fascism. Even after the horrors of World War II, the most she can say is that "Hitler was a naughty boy." Moreover, her carefully laid plan to live vicariously in the adulterous relationship between Rose Stanley and Teddy Lloyd goes awry because she fails to perceive the true characters of both Rose and Sandy. In Jean Brodie's self-assured knowingness, one is reminded of Muriel Spark's narrative persona; as Richard Mayne once called it, "a mother-knows-best dead certainty" (Encounter, 25 [1965]). But there is considerable difference between fictionalizing by making patterns with facts, as a novelist must, and believing those fictions to be true, as Miss Brodie does.

Like a novelist, then, Jean Brodie is a story-teller who tells lies. She does not lie deliberately; indeed, she is unconscious of lying, because she fails to understand that to arrange facts into patterns is to necessarily distort the truth. Mrs. Spark herself was aware of this problem, from the time of *The Comforters* at least. In that novel it will be recalled that Caroline Rose objects mightily to being a "character" who is being written into a "novel." At one point she tells Father Jerome: "It's as if the person was waiting to pounce on some insignificant thought or action, in order to make it signify in a strange distorted way." But Jean Brodie is unaware of the existence of such an epistemological problem. And so too Sandy Stranger, the other lying "novelist" in *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie*. Sandy's case is a more subtle one, however, and for that reason, possibly, has been largely misunderstood.

Besides constantly fantasizing about love, Sandy actually commits her fictions to paper, in particular "The Mountain Eyrie: The True Love Story of Miss Jean Brodie." In addition to its thematic significance, the word "true" in the title of Sandy's story is ironic in the extreme when one considers her story to be a brilliant mixture of rhetorical modes—romantic clichés, vulgar journalese, adolescent slang. The result is, of course, a hilarious distortion of the truth, whatever it may be. Throughout the novel, in fact, Sandy never seems capable of reconciling "reality" (the evidence of her senses) with her innate sense of how things are or ought to be. In this respect, she differs not at all from Miss Brodie. She cannot believe for example that Miss Brodie and Hugh Carruthers ever had sexual intercourse because "their love was above all that." She cannot believe Monica's story of discovering Miss Brodie and Teddy Lloyd embracing in the art room. The only way that this incident can become "real" for Sandy is to have Monica tell the story over and over.

Two incidents especially, however, illustrate the gap between the empirical world and Sandy's subjective understanding. In the first, during a rather traumatic field trip to the Old Town section of Edinburgh, Sandy witnesses a drunken brawl between a man and a woman. Another woman comes up, takes the man by the arm, and says, "'I'll be your man.' From time to time throughout her life Sandy pondered this, for she was certain that the little woman's words were 'I'll be your man,' not 'I'll be your woman,' and it was never explained." The second incident concerns Sandy's friend Jenny, who one day "out walking alone, was accosted by a man joyfully exposing himself beside the Water of Leith." Sandy is fascinated by this occurrence, especially Jenny's interrogation by a policewoman, and asks Jenny to tell of it again and again. What disturbs Sandy most is to learn that in her talks with Jenny the policewoman had pronounced it properly. The result was that Sandy had to invent a new feeling in Sandy and it put her off the idea of sex for months. All the more as she disapproved of the pronunciation of the word, it made her flesh creep, and she plagued Jenny to change her mind and agree that the policewoman had pronounced the word "nasty" as "nesty." "This gave rise to an extremely nasty speaking-image for the policewoman." In a word, then, only rhetoric is "real" to Sandy, a rhetoric that is rooted in a unique, abstracted, solipsistic vision. By means of such rhetoric is the commonplace "transformed." And by such means as this do novelists tell lies by distorting reality. It is certainly not coincidental that several times Mrs. Spark describes Sandy as having "little pig eyes," almost non-existent eyes. Professor Lodge is probably correct, therefore, in saying that as an "inside narrator" Sandy Stranger is unreliable. This being so, it seems safe to assume that Sister Helena's famous treatise on moral perception was intended by Mrs. Spark to be a joke. Whether one arranges facts into patterns according to abstracted rhetorical, aesthetic, or moral principles, one necessarily distorts the truth.

I have already noted David Lodge's assertion that Sandy's judgment of Jean Brodie, and consequently the reader's own judgment, is ethical and religious, that Miss Brodie is punished for playing God, for creating fictions she literally believes in. Sandy comes to understand this, says Professor Lodge, because unlike Jean Brodie, Sandy has learned the difference between fiction and the real world. In evidence, Professor Lodge notes the symbolic significance of Sandy's literally burying forever in a little cave her fictionalized romance of Miss Brodie's love life. I suggest, however, that it is Muriel Spark, not Sandy Stranger, who perceives the difference between fiction and truth, and that the novel judges Sandy for precisely the same reasons that Sandy judges Miss Brodie. Professor Lodge quotes Christopher Ricks, who complains that Muriel Spark "commits as novelist the sins she condemns in her characters." Readers of Muriel Spark will feel that the charge is not unjustified; but in *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie* Mrs. Spark clearly has her wits about her, for if Miss Brodie becomes the hapless victim of her own fictional illusions, so too does Sandy Stranger. It might appear that in burying the manuscript of Miss Brodie's love life Sandy abandons her preadolescent fantasies; in fact, however, she substitutes for them another fiction, a fiction that she subsequently acts upon. Having heard all of the delicious details of Jenny's great sexual adventure, Sandy "had quite deserted Alan Breck and Mr. Rochester and all of the heroes of fiction for the summer term, and fell in love with the unseen policewoman who had questioned Jenny." Subsequently, Sandy imagines herself Sergeant Anne Grey's "right-hand woman in the Force, and they were dedicated to eliminate sex from Edinburgh and environs." It is Miss Brodie's "excessive lack of guilt" about her own sexuality that Sandy must put a stop to. When Sandy finally provides Miss Mackay with the handle she needs by revealing Jean Brodie's admiration for Fascism, Miss Mackay says, "I had no idea you felt so serious about the state of world affairs." To this Sandy replies, "I'm not really interested in world affairs, only in putting a stop to Miss Brodie." Indeed, politics is not a part of Sandy's consciousness. Her chief preoccupation, almost obsessively so, is with sex.

The point here, however, is not to assign "real" psychological motives for Sandy's puzzling betrayal of Miss Brodie. The point is "novelistic," for in betraying Miss Brodie Sandy acts out the role of her fictional creation, Sergeant Anne Grey's right-hand woman. Miss Brodie, too, behaves like a fictional character. It is evident, for example, that she has been corrupted by romantic fiction. Professor Lodge notes that Jane Eyre is Miss Brodie's favourite novel; more importantly and to the point he notes that her own love life "bears a parodic resemblance" to that novel. Whatever the nature of the real relationship between the sexes, an inhabitant of the Twentieth Century would be sorely deluded, as Miss Brodie was, to be guided by Nineteenth Century fictions. But if Miss Brodie was corrupted by the rhetoric of romance, Sandy Stranger was equally corrupted by the sleazy rhetoric of post-Victorian journalese, for all of her adolescent attitudes about sex are informed by this rhetoric: "In the Sunday newspapers, to which Sandy had free access, the correct technical phrases were to be found, such as 'intimacy took place' and 'plaintiff was in a certain condition.' Females who were up for sex were not called 'Miss' or 'Mrs.,' they were referred to by their surnames: 'Willis was remanded in custody …' 'Roebuck, said Counsel, was discovered to be in a certain condition.'" At one extreme, then, in Jean Brodie's case, sexuality is corrupted by the transcendent innocence of romantic rhetoric; at the other extreme, in Sandy's case, it is corrupted by an implicitly dirty-minded newspaper rhetoric. Both, of course, are distortions of the truth, whatever complex thing it may be. Sandy's burial, then, of her romantic manuscript in that (Freudian) cave is certainly symbolic: it symbolizes the repression of a youthful innocent, spontaneous sexuality, a repression that is perfectly in keeping with her ultimate vows of chastity as Sister Helena of the Transfiguration. There is a great irony here, for it seems clear that Sandy has not been liberated by her conversion. She has not escaped the Calvinism that she desired to reject; indeed, she became its victim, guilt-ridden and trapped, behind the bars of her grille, in its harsh moral imperatives.

Not only is truth hidden from Sandy behind a veil of false rhetoric, as it is for Miss Brodie, but also both behave as if the real world itself is based upon novelistic techniques. We have already seen, thanks to Professor Lodge, that in many ways Miss Brodie recreates in her own love life the story of Jane Eyre, her favourite novel. As for Sandy, besides acting out her fantasy as Sergeant Anne Grey's right-hand woman on the Force, when the time comes for her to betray Miss Brodie she acts upon the principles of aesthetic "economy" which she had learned from both Miss Brodie and Teddy Lloyd. The question is, of course, can moral judgments, which are rooted in the transcendent absolute, be arrived at by means of such strictly aesthetic principles? Assuming that both novels and the world itself have "meanings" which are "true," does one "read" the world as one reads novels to discover that truth? The suggestion is, in *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie*, that the answer to these questions is no, that it is dangerous to assume that God's real world is created on the same aesthetic principles that an author employs in creating a fictional world. In making such a false assumption, Sandy Stranger failed to see that art and life are radically different. Mrs. Spark makes this same point in Memento Mori when Guy Leets is talking to Charmian Colston about her novels. Charmian says:

"And yet, when I was halfway through writing a novel I always got into a muddle and didn't know where it was leading me."

Guy thought: She is going to say—dear Chairman—she is going to say, "The characters seemed to take on a life of their own."

"The characters," said Charmian, "seemed to take control of my pen after awhile. But at first I always got into a tangle … because the art of fiction is very like the practice of deception."

"And in life," he said, "is the practice of deception in life an art too?"

"In life," she said, "everything is different. Everything is in the Providence of God."

Ironically, of course, Charmian's whole life has been based on deceptions. Even though she knows that art and life are different, she behaves as if they were the same. But poor Sandy Stranger is not even aware of the difference. And at novel's end, now Sister Helena of the Transfiguration, something has gone wrong; somehow she has been trapped, somehow made a victim. She has been victimized by acting upon her unconscious assumption that art and life make the same kind of sense and for the same reasons.

Some years ago Charles Hoyt wrote of Mrs. Spark's novels: "The excitement infused into all her best fiction, that quality which I attempted to define at the outset, derives from some formidable positive charge of Edinburgh Calvinism against its opposite, the negative of mystical Catholicism." It seems clear that embodied in the very structure of many of Mrs. Spark's novels is this unresolved Calvinist-Catholic duality—the Calvinist vision of the world as predestined and damned, on the one hand, versus a liberated Catholic vision of the world as possibilities. And though this would seem to be a strictly theological problem, more often than not Mrs. Spark conceptualizes it in Freudian terms, so that the theological and the Freudian seem irrevocably linked in any given novel. Whether this is done consciously or whether it is instead unconsciously "mythic," so to speak, it is clear from Robinson, among other works, that Mrs. Spark was thoroughly familiar with popular Freudian theories. As in Robinson, we find once again in *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie* this characteristic Freudian-theological configuration; and whereas Robinson was a blatant Freudian allegory, one might therefore have reason to believe that Sandy Stranger and Jean Brodie are emblematic of the Alter-ego and the Id, respectively. They are elements in the personality of the artist as a young girl, as well as being common coin, it seems, in the patterns of Mrs. Spark's novels. We find, then, a classic Freudian conflict that in *The Comforters* and in Robinson finds its resolution in Catholic belief. Only when Caroline Rose forces herself to touch Mrs. Hogg's carnality is her liberation complete. Significantly, of course, this act occurs in a religious context, for in that manner and at that point the novel proves its contention that Caroline is a free-willing agent in God's providential design. Similarly, January Marlow faced the same problem, and resolved it by rejecting Miles Robinson's cold rationality and accepting mystical

Mariology, weighted as it is, in the novel, towards the feminine, the irrational, the creative. Barbara Vaughan, too, made a similar choice, finally liberated in her adventures on the irrational side of the Mandelbaum Gate, finally accepting the fact of her sexuality, for "the whole of life is unified under God."

But Sandy Stranger, the artist as a young girl, had not yet been liberated from the conflict between her Id, Jean Brodie, and her Alter-ego, Sergeant Anne Grey and the forbidding religion of Calvin. She had not yet discovered, as the artist as a middle-aged woman obviously had, the syncretic possibilities of mystical Catholicism. True to her instincts as an artist, however, she nevertheless realized that here at the deeper levels of the lawless Id was the probable source of creative energy; and thus its "beneficent and enlarging effects." In Catholicism Mrs. Spark seems to have found her identity, both as a novelist and as an individual. But in spite of the self-assured tone of her narrative persona, her novels indicate that hers was not an easy faith. It required living with paradoxes and impossible contradictions. What better way to communicate the impossibilities of faith than in the symbol of a convert nun with imperfect "vision," desperately clutching the bars of her grille?

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Moral Vision in Muriel Spark's *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie*

Muriel Spark's novel, *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie*, is an economical treatise on moral perception which exemplifies not only the necessity of such perception, but also the terrible responsibility accompanying its acquisition. This relationship, arising from the close association between knowledge and action, is central to the conflict of the book and is reflected in its very structure. To understand how the novel itself becomes a treatise on moral perception, I shall examine three discernible points of view: that of Jean Brodie herself, that of Sandy Stranger, and that of the narrator (or point of view, properly speaking). Finally, I will move from the work itself to examine the relationship between the author and the novel.

From the beginning of Muriel Spark's novel, the reader is invited to view Jean Brodie as a God-like character, a teacher-saviour surrounded by her faithful disciples whom she has chosen as the recipients of her saving message and one of whom will eventually betray her. Sandy Stranger says: "She thinks she is Providence,… she thinks she is the God of Calvin, she sees the beginning and end." Whether Jean perceives herself in this way or not is uncertain, but she acts as if she were a kind of God: the God of Providence in her attempts to shape, direct, and control the lives of her charges even after they are no longer officially hers and God the Creator, who, in a sense, fashions a world for herself and populates it with creatures of her own imagining.

Within the real world in which Jean lives and moves, she has created another world, a world as it should be as opposed to the world which is. Consequently, Miss Brodie's girls are as much a product of her fancy and imagination as they are real flesh-and-blood students at Marcia Blaine's Academy. They seem to have been chosen not for any particular, common characteristics, but according to a principle of plenitude: one is good at math; one is noted for her voice and her ability to recite; one for her eyes; one is famous for sex; one provides comic relief. Other characters, such as Miss Mackay, Gordon Lowther, Teddy Lloyd, and the Gaunt sisters, are also transformed and recreated by Jean Brodie's fancy. The more removed from present reality they actually are, as is Hugh, Jean's lover killed in the war, the more protean they become in adopting the shapes necessary for Jean Brodie's current vision.

This vision is at once Jean's strength and weakness. It allows her to transcend the mundane, to see values beyond the merely practical. At the same time, however, it is confused, and she fails to distinguish between life and art; that is to say, what ought to be prudential judgments become for her aesthetic judgments. Thus the vision which leads her to regard Giotto as the greatest painter (and to prescribe that view for others) is the same vision that prompts her to admire the order which Fascism imposes upon its subjects. She is blind to the essential evils of Fascism and comes to no stronger conclusion than that Hitler was a bit naughty.

Because she confuses aesthetic judgments with moral ones, it is not surprising that how far a window should be opened or how one should comport oneself are just as important to Jean as are larger political questions. Just as her own affair with Gordon Lowther seems to have no moral dimension, her plan that Rose Stanley should become Teddy Lloyd's lover and that Sandy Stranger should be the one to bring Jean the news is devised without any consideration of the moral rightness or wrongness of the act. Such questions are irrelevant to Jean: "Just as an excessive sense of guilt can drive people to excessive action, so was Miss Brodie driven to it by an excessive lack of guilt." Right and wrong are the concerns of the Miss Mackays of the world, and Jean is careful not to let their world impinge on hers. Unfortunately, she does not see the implications of her own vision in the lives of others who, no matter how she conceives of them, live in the real world as well. Despite her betrayal and final abandonment, Jean never gains any insight into what has really happened to her. Without the requisite moral vision, she remains obsessed with the unimportant question of who betrayed her, rather than with the significant one of why she was betrayed.

In contrast to Jean Brodie, Sandy Stranger acquires a broader vision of the world. Sandy had shared her teacher's romantic view of life, as is evidenced by her collaboration with Jenny Gray on "The Mountain Eyrie," a romantic story peopled with characters drawn from fiction and from real life and transmogrified by the girls' young imaginations and speculations about Jean Brodie's life and loves. Like Jean, Sandy and Jenny create an unreal, romantic, fictional world, but as Sandy matures, her perception of the world changes. By making a distinction between the world of her own devising and the real world, she develops a moral vision which Jean never achieves. Included in the development of that vision is the ability to separate fiction from fact, romance from reality, the prudential from the aesthetic, good from evil. Sandy's vision reaches its fullest formulation in her psychological treatise on moral perception, "The Transfiguration of the Commonplace," which she writes after she becomes Sister Helena, a member of a cloistered, contemplative religious order.

The title of Sandy's treatise, which has spiritual and scriptural significance, illustrates her change in vision. The scriptural account of the transfiguration occurs in Matthew xvii. 1-8:

Now after six days Jesus took Peter, James and his brother John, and led them up a high mountain by themselves, and was transfigured before them. And his face shone as the sun, and his garments became white as snow. And behold, there appeared to them Moses and Elias talking together with him. Then Peter addressed Jesus saying, "Lord, it is good for us to be here. If thou wilt, let us set up three tents here, one for thee, one for Moses, and one for Elias." As he was still speaking, behold a bright cloud overshadowed them, and behold, a voice out of the cloud said, "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased; hear him." And on hearing it the disciples fell on their faces and were exceedingly afraid. And Jesus came near and touched them, and said to them, "Arise and do not be afraid." But lifting up their eyes, they saw no one but Jesus only.

This vision of the glorified Christ afforded Peter, James and John was a kind of beatific vision, a view of eternity. When the everyday is transfigured, the temporal is transcended, and the commonplace, seen in relation to eternal things, takes on eternal significance. The person who has been granted such a vision no longer sees the world from only a temporal point of view, but rather sub specie aeternitatis. From that aspect, the world takes on a spiritual and moral dimension which it otherwise does not have; it is this vision, this transfiguration, which Sandy perceives.

Although the full formulation of that vision presented in her treatise does not occur until some years later, Sandy is aware of its essential elements during her time at Marcia Blaine's Academy, and it is this awareness which leads her to betray Jean Brodie. Sandy comes to see not only the divine stance which Jean has assumed, but to recognize also that Jean's manipulation—or attempted manipulation—of people is dangerous. She realizes the potential for evil which Jean possesses and unwittingly exercises because of her narrow vision—not only the foolish pronouncements about art, music, and politics, but the tragedy of Joyce Emily Hammond killed in Spain. Sandy realizes, ultimately, that knowledge is intimately connected with action. Since she sees little hope that anyone else will effectively end Jean's sway, she decides that she must do it herself.

Although she must try to see things sub specie aeternitatis, from God's point of view, Sandy does not identify herself with God as she suggests Jean does. Sandy's God is not the God of Calvin, the creator who has "planned for practically everybody before they were born a nasty surprise when they died" and to whom human actions were not meritorious; rather, he is the God of Roman Catholicism, the creator of beings responsible for their own acts, which can merit reward and punishment. This concept of God demands that the person who would act prudentially must first adopt God's point of view and then conform his own actions to that view.

Consequently, Sandy's growth in perception, which compels her to view human actions sub specie aeternitatis, not only leads her to take action against her teacher but compels her to view her own act from this higher perspective. She does not see her action as a betrayal since there is, she says, no question of betrayal where no loyalty is due. But she is deeply disturbed by having to have acted, and her conversion to Catholicism and subsequent entry into a convent are results of that action. By choosing to enter a contemplative order, she rejects the life of action and the responsibility for judging and acting on that judgment again. Clutching the bars of the grille separating her from the world and the active life, she is like a caged animal, locked up so that she will do no more harm. By stopping Jean Brodie, Sandy has in effect stopped herself. She is being precise when she replies to the question, "What were the main influences of your school days?" with "There was a Miss Jean Brodie in her prime."

In spite of Sandy's wider vision, she is not a particularly likeable character. Some of our reservations about her spring, I believe, from her striking similarity to Jean Brodie. It is perhaps this similarity which accounts for the fact that Sandy seems to be the only Brodie girl upon whom Jean has had a marked and lasting effect. Most are like Eunice, who remembers Jean fondly as being a bit eccentric, but whose life shows no lasting mark of Jean's training. Both Sandy and Jean are passionate, zealous people. If Jean implicitly thinks herself to be like God, seeing both beginning and end, shaping people and situations for her own purposes, so does Sandy in her decision to judge and sentence Jean. If Jean sees her students not as individuals but as embodiments of abstractions—instinct, insight, comic relief (indicated by the epithets or tags often associated with them)—so does Sandy see Jean as an abstraction: "It was twenty-five years before Sandy had so far recovered from a creeping vision of disorder that she could look back and recognize that Miss Brodie's defective sense of self-criticism had not been without its beneficent and enlarging effects."

Jean, who regarded highly the economy of Teddy Lloyd's painting style and technique, employs a certain economy in her own arrangement of people and events, adapting her plans quickly and efficiently to conform to situations over which she has no control. Sandy, when the time comes to stop Jean, acts upon the principle that "where there was a choice of various courses, the most economical was the best…." Jean's and Sandy's concern with "economy" suggests the theological dimension of the term, in the sense of the divine plan for man. Jean, acting as the God of Calvin, is Providence, her plan similar to the "divine plan hidden in the intellect of God from all eternity … and revealed in the divine acts of salvation through His prophets, through Jesus Christ, and through His Holy Spirit." The meaning of Sandy's economy goes a step further: "Divine economy likewise embraces the mystery of the execution of the divine plan of salvation. Creatures to whom God communicates a participation in His causality are secondary agents through whom He acts in applying the fruits of His redemptive act" [M.R.E. Masterman, "Divine Economy," in New Catholic Encyclopedia, 1967]. Although she does not think consciously in these terms, Sandy becomes, in effect, a "secondary agent" when she acts to stop Jean.

Sandy herself recognizes her similarity to Jean. The potential for destruction which she herself possesses is impressed upon her when she encounters Jean in a hotel dining room after the war. It is not too fanciful to suggest that the title of the book, *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie*, refers not only to that time of life when Jean was most flourishing, but also to Sandy. The word prime is also used for the mark used to distinguish designations of similar quantities, as in a and á, and Sandy is certainly "Jean Brodie Prime."

Just as Sandy's vision is wider than that of Jean Brodie, so the narrator's point of view—omniscient—is a term used to identify one of the attributes of God, and the method of narration underscores this quality. Although working within a time frame, 1936 to the time of narration, the narrator prescinds from time, jumping freely back and forth from one time to another, spanning years in one sentence. The technique is not, of course, unusual, nor among Spark's works is it peculiar to this novel. In a review of The Mandelbaum Gate ["The Novel as Jerusalem: Muriel Spark's Mandelbaum Gate," Atlantic Monthly (October 1965)], for instance, Frank Kermode observes that Spark deliberately gives away the end of the story, and "in a narrative which could have regular climactic moments she fudges them, simply because the design of her world, like God's, has more interesting aspects than mere chronological progress and the satisfaction of naive expectations in the reader." But this technique is particularly appropriate to *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie*. There, the narrator not only assumes an omniscient, Godlike position in relation to the material and in the method of narration, but creates and shapes the characters themselves in a way not unlike that in which Jean Brodie and Sandy Stranger shape their world and its inhabitants. In addition, the narrator's vision, like Jean's and Sandy's, results in action—that of telling the story. In this sense, what is narrated is a world in itself, a creation based on the narrator's point of view or perception.

There are, then, three visions in Muriel Spark's novel: Jean's, Sandy's, and the narrator's, each one wider and more comprehensive than the preceding and representing a higher degree of knowledge or perception. All three characters, in their roles as knowers and shapers, act according to a principle of order discernible in their actions thereby exemplifying what Ann Dobie says about Muriel Spark [in "Muriel Spark's Definition of Reality," Critique (1970)]: "She demonstrates that man is inherently limited in his complete perception of [reality], but that with each additional degree of understanding he experiences a kind of rebirth. She describes understanding as vision, a new concept of oneself and the world which is based upon the individual's acceptance of a basic order in both." The very structure of this particular novel reflects and underscores its message.

There is, of course, another vision implicit in the book, that of Muriel Spark herself. I make here a distinction between the narrator and the author to stress the fact that the novel and everything in it, including the narrator's voice, is an artifact, a creation. Spark herself has said [as quoted by Dobie]: "Fiction to me is a kind of parable," and Kermode points out that in Spark's novels "a genuine relation exists between the forms of fiction and the forms of the world, between the novelist's creation and God's" so that all her novels "are in a sense novels about the novel, inquiries into the relation between fictions and truth."

By depicting three incremental degrees of understanding, *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie* reflects yet another degree, another vision and "rebirth," to use Dobie's word. The novel itself becomes a kind of transfiguration of the commonplace, revealing the author's point of view and inviting the reader to share it. It is a point of view applicable to the author's complete oeuvre. Furthermore, the novel represents another relationship between knowledge and action. Given the artist's vision, the appropriate action for the artist is to produce a work of art. The appropriate action for Miss Spark is to write a book, an action which is, in its fullest sense, human and moral.

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The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie

With *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie*, Muriel Spark became famous and rich, a celebrated novelist with a wide audience. The title character of the novel fascinated readers and also became known through theatre and cinema. Vanessa Redgrave first performed the role of the Scottish schoolteacher in Jay Presson Allen's play version in London in 1966, and Zoe Caldwell played Jean Brodie in New York. Maggie Smith won an Oscar for her creation of the role in the 1969 film, and Geraldine McEwan interpreted Miss Brodie for television audiences in the series shown on PBS in 1979. Jean Brodie and her "set" of girls became widely known, and a common response to the main character was, "I had a Jean Brodie in my life."

The novel has also elicited complex analyses from literary critics, many of whom judge it Spark's most distinctive and effective work. Such diversity of response—from popular media presentations with theatrical flair, to individual empathy, to arguments about theological and moral implications—is most appropriate to a writer noted for her wry wit, satirical view of human behaviour, and examination of the nature of truth and art. Her audience's bafflement mirrors Spark's own view that, though everything is possible, no one individual can know reality. Thus personal assertions appear comically grotesque.

The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie is more a novella than a novel. Short, compact, and economical, it provides a useful introduction to Spark, who wrote it in eight weeks, calling on memories of her girlhood in Edinburgh. She has described the novel, which most explicitly uses her Scottish heritage, as the work of "an exile in heart and mind—cautious, affectionate, critical" ["What Images Return," in Memoirs of a Modern Scotland, edited by Karl Miller, 1970]. The play and film versions provided excellent vehicles for their stars; the charismatic schoolteacher compelled admiration, though Jean Brodie remained sufficiently ambiguous to complicate responses even with the simplification of dramatic presentation. Spark's fiction is more elusive and needs repeated careful and thoughtful readings to understand what lies below the surface appeal.

The main line of the narrative is not easy to discern, for there are many time shifts. Actually, these are crucial to the reader's understanding, for they force greater attention. The manipulation of time leads to something more than the amused delight that might be derived from a straightforward chronology that realistically tells the story of a dazzling eccentric and her impressionable students. Spark deliberately tells the reader early in the novel what the outcome of events will be, that Miss Brodie will be betrayed by her trusted pupil Sandy Stranger. With suspense eschewed, the interest lies in understanding why things happen rather than what happened.

This is further emphasized by the absence of explanations from Jean Brodie of why she behaves as she does. She is seen largely through the eyes of the girls, who speculate about their teacher. Although the novel includes events from a period of twenty years, the time when the "Brodie set" changed from pupils to adults, the concentration is on their girlhood experiences. And the major focus is on one girl, Sandy Stranger.

The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie begins in 1936, when the girls are sixteen and have moved out of the junior division of the Marcia Blaine School for Girls in Edinburgh and Miss Brodie's class. Although they remain "the Brodie set," proving the accuracy of their teacher's maxim "Give me a girl at an impressionable age, and she is mine for life," each now wears her hat "with a definite difference." But the story soon shifts back to those formative years, 1930 and 1931, when six schoolgirls receive a remarkable education from a "progressive spinster" who teaches in a school of traditional character, serving as "a leaven in the lump" at "this educational factory." Monica Douglas ("famous for mathematics and anger"), Jenny Gray ("who was going to be an actress"), Eunice Gardner ("famous for gymnastics and swimming"), Rose Stanley ("famous for sex"), Mary Macgregor ("a silent lump, a nobody whom everybody could blame"), and Sandy Stranger ("merely notorious for her small, almost nonexistent eyes" and "famous for her vowel sounds"), are selected at age ten to be the crème de la crème. Their formidable teacher epitomizes each as "famous" for something and introduces all to her romantic aesthetic vision. They adopt her taste for Giotto, Pavlova, Sybil Thorndike, and the belief that art comes before science. They have no "team spirit" in the school and are a group set apart. Miss Brodie declares that she is in her prime, which she defines as "the moment one was born for," and she dedicates her life to forming her girls, giving them "the fruits of her prime."

The headmistress Miss Mackay, who believes in the slogan "Safety First" and favors practical flowers like chrysanthemums, schemes to rid the Marcia Blaine School of Miss Brodie by discrediting her. However, this is quite difficult, since all the girls in the set (except Mary Macgregor, who is a kind of scapegoat) are clever and capable, and they admire their teacher. Furthermore, Miss Brodie is vigilant and careful about appearances, however outrageously she behaves.

The obvious possibility for discreditation is sex, particularly since in 1931, the year that the girls turn eleven and twelve and first become aware, "sex is everything." Both of the men teachers at the school are certainly interested in "a magnificent woman in her prime," and the girls increasingly recognize that "she was really an exciting woman as a woman." Teddy Lloyd, the art master, is the more dashing, for he lost an arm in World War I. But he is married and a Roman Catholic, and Jean Brodie finds a romantic renunciation of love far more exciting than an actual experience. She begins telling the girls of her lost lover Hugh, who died on Flanders Field, and gradually Teddy Lloyd's characteristics are fused into her fantasies. She also plans a surrogate affair using Rose, who is Lloyd's model (for pictures that all look like Jean Brodie). The other man is Gordon Lowther, the singing master, who is not married and an elder of the Church of Scotland. With him, Jean Brodie does have an affair, often staying at his home in Cramond. But she refuses to marry him, lest she be deterred from her dedication to her girls. Finally he marries the science teacher, Miss Lockhart, because he cannot tolerate Jean Brodie's distorted romanticism. Early in the novel, Sandy and Jenny presciently compare their teacher with their parents: she never got married, and they do not have primes, but they do have sexual intercourse.

The way to trap Miss Brodie is, then, politics, according to Sandy. This "beady eyed" girl, who is most like Miss Brodie in temperament and whose point of view dominates the story, becomes Teddy Lloyd's mistress in the summer of 1938, while Miss Brodie is touring in Germany to see what Hitler's brownshirts are like.

In Nazi Germany the domineering Miss Brodie enlarges her earlier admiration for the Italian fascisti, the marching troops of blackshirts, seen in the previous summer's holidays, "with their hands raised at the same angle, while Mussolini stood on platform like a gym teacher or Guides mistress and watched them." The comparison is a deliberate authorial comment, for Sandy Stranger views Miss Brodie as "a born Fascist." Sandy is not interested in politics, but she is obsessed with Miss Brodie. She tells Miss Mackay that Jean Brodie was responsible for sending Joyce Emily Hammond off to Spain, ironically not to join her brother's fight against Franco but to support the Fascist cause. This wretched girl, a latecomer and wouldbe member of the set, is killed in a train en route. Sandy gives the information to Miss Mackay, who then forces Miss Brodie to resign in 1939. Because Sandy recognizes that her teacher's manipulation of the set ignores their individuality and that she has no sense of the importance of another's life, Sandy decides that Jean Brodie's fascist control must be stopped.

By this time Sandy Stranger is no longer Teddy Lloyd's mistress, but she continues to admire his economical method of presentation and uses it in her betrayal of Miss Brodie. In less than a year, the man ceases to interest Sandy, though she was fascinated by his mind. The most important thing that she extracts from Lloyd's mind is his religion, and Sandy enters the Catholic Church. In this, she is in sharp contrast to Miss Brodie, who is contemptuous about Lloyd's religion. Sandy not only converts to the Church of Rome; she also enters an order of enclosed nuns.

As Sister Helena of the Transfiguration she writes "an odd psychological treatise on the nature of moral perception, called 'The Transfiguration of the Commonplace.'" In her middle age in the late 1950s, she is forced, because of this achievement, to have choice visitors even though her order is enclosed. She explains to an enquiring interviewer that the biggest influence on her was neither politics nor Calvinism, but "a Miss Jean Brodie in her prime." Some of her friends from schooldays also visit, and they talk of their teacher. Always Sister Helena "clutches the bars of her grille," but "more desperately than ever" when she admits what most influenced her.

Miss Brodie spends her last years in the Braid Hills Hotel, trying to learn who "betrayed" her. She dies of cancer in 1946 when she is fifty-six years old. In one way, the novella is an account of this woman's rise and fall, but it also chronicles responses to her "prime." Muriel Spark has explained that she always begins with a title and then works out the story. Both as word and idea, "prime" resonates through the story. In no other work does she so relentlessly repeat a phrase, and the reader is led to a rich contemplation of the meanings of "prime of life" far beyond the narrative itself. The style of this short work, so evocative in its economy and simple language, reflected the experience of Spark's early poetic career. In an interview [with Ian Gillham published as "Keeping It Short," The Listener (24 September 1970)], Muriel Spark said that "Jean Brodie represents completely unrealized potentialities." This broad statement of the theme provides a useful way of approaching the story's meaning.

The realistic details of *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie* are unobtrusive, but so exactly introduced that they establish an immediate sense of time and place. The Edinburgh of the 1930s is vividly evoked in Chapter Two when Miss Brodie takes the girls on a walking excursion "into the reeking network of slums which the Old Town constituted in those years." This is a first direct experience for them away from the security of their middle-class homes. The poverty and desperation, the devastating loss of human possibility, are indicated in a single line: "A man sat on the icy-cold pavement, he just sat." They are stunned by the terrible smell of the area; they see men and women quarrelling and a long queue of shabby men waiting for the Dole. Sandy is frightened by the squalor of the Unemployed, and she is aware of the discrepancy between these people and herself, though when she is older she perceives a common misery that has nothing to do with economics. Before World War II, she is more concerned about relief in Edinburgh than events on the Continent.

Spark is not a political novelist, but she is trying to define the context in which she lived. *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie* corresponds to her own girlhood in Edinburgh, and the historical significance is very important. The Idle Unemployed are most obviously the casualties of the economic depression that shattered the Western world, as the last shudder of the Great War and the wild extravagances of the 1920s that followed it. The emerging Fascists are one answer to the defeat and loss of spirit. Other casualties of World War I are personally shown—the lost lover Hugh Carruthers, the maimed art master, and Jean herself.

Only one of "the legions of her kind during the nineteen-thirties, women from the age of thirty and upward, who crowded their war-bereaved spinsterhood with voyages of discovery into new ideas and energetic practices in art or social welfare, education, or religion," Jean Brodie epitomizes the plight of the Lost Generation, those who lived in a world where traditional values and expectations had been displaced. The romantic tales with which the teacher regales her girls are an evasion of the realities of human experience. The importance of fantasy in the forming of the child is an accepted tenet of sophisticated psychology, but the fantasy should result in an increasingly mature understanding and coping with human experience.

It is one thing for Sandy and Jenny to write romantic tales modelled on their favourite nineteenth-century narratives, Kidnapped, The Lady of Shalott, and Jane Eyre. This allows a relatively safe youthful exploration of experience—and an opportunity for Muriel Spark to write hilarious parodies of much-loved English classics and sentimental love letters. But it is quite another thing for forty-year-old Jean Brodie to substitute fantasies of lost and renounced lovers for recognition of her own sexuality, particularly when she wants the fantasy to turn into reality by having one of the girls take her place in Lloyd’s bed. A reading of *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie* as a menopausal crisis or unconscious lesbianism is far too simplistic, but the text provides enough evidence to suggest these possibilities. There is a fervid urgency about her creation of the "set" that argues a desperate lack of fulfilment, "the unrealized potentialities" that are salient.

Nevertheless, the novel can be described as a consideration of excessive self-indulgence, an exposition of the dangers and evil of a life that is concentrated solely in self. For, although Jean Brodie asserts that she is giving her prime to the schoolgirls, she is actually using them to avoid having to act herself, and her constant reiteration of her self-sacrifice limits the worth of whatever she does. Sandy early notes how Miss Brodie has "elected herself to grace." "She thinks she is

Providence, thought Sandy, she thinks she is the God of Calvin, she sees the beginning and the end." Miss Brodie believes that God is on her side and has no idea of her own sinful nature. Hers is a very personal and secularized Calvinism.

The term "Calvinism" is used, of course, in many ways. [In an endnote, Richmond explains: "The French Protestant theologian John Calvin (1509–1564) completed the Institutes of the Christian Religion in 1536 in Geneva, where austere reforms were later implemented. Civic authorities were responsible for enforcing religious teaching, and all areas of life were regulated. In Scotland John Knox was the advocate of this theology, and in the colonial United States Jonathan Edwards introduced a modified version. Intense Biblicism and resolute theocentricity, magnifying the sovereignty and providence of God, are fundamental in Calvinism, which is thus strongly related to the theology of St. Augustine (354-430), the most influential writer in the early period of the Catholic Church. A distinction of Calvinism is that it bridges the gulf between the luxury of the world and the life of the spirit by dedicating them to the service of God. This quality was strongly appealing in an age of expanding capitalism."] In *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie*, Spark shows this view of humanity as a focal point of Edinburgh, and the characteristics that she emphasizes are a belief in the Elect and the Damned, the idea that man's salvation is predestined by God, and the idea of a community that is righteously and rigorously controlled. Nominally, Jean Brodie has rejected Edinburgh's Calvinism through her flamboyance, but in practice her crème de la crème are a secularized elect, the chosen elite selected from the larger group. Sandy deliberately contemplates the architectural landmarks of St. Giles Cathedral and the Tolbooth in an attempt to include the Calvinist theology that is lacking from her English experience. She also recognizes that Catholicism might have been what Miss Brodie lacked. But Sandy's own entry into the Roman Church is not a simplistic triumph of Catholic values. Her betrayal, her book, her spiritual condition—all lack certainty, as indeed is inevitable in this life, even for those who act decisively.

A manipulator of lives, Jean Brodie admires absolutist domination, as her attraction to Fascist leaders most clearly illustrates. Further, she is not capable of recognizing her own failures; even after World War II, she goes no farther than an admission that "Hitler was rather naughty." This grotesquely inadequate judgment is like her utter failure to recognize her culpability in treating Mary Macgregor with wanton unkindness, or in precipitating the death of the new girl Joyce Emily Hammond. And obviously she has not the slightest idea of how she influences Sandy Stranger, who betrays her precisely because she judges that no one should be allowed to exercise such unremitting control over the lives of others. (Paradoxically, of course, Sandy is behaving in the same controlling way; and her "small beady eyes" symbolize her limited, narrow vision.) Perhaps nothing so richly illustrates Jean Brodie's self-absorption as her incredulity that anyone could betray her—even Christ was betrayed, and He is God.

The novella, then, is concerned to define the nature of the human condition. The two principals, Jean Brodie and her near double Sandy Stranger (she actually assumes her teacher's role as Lloyd's mistress), know very little about it. Both fail to recognize its essentially mundane quality. The teacher refuses to admit the ordinary; she spins romantic fantasies to evade the limitations of life in this world—both those that come from political and social conditions and those that derive from personal blindness and pride. The pupil becomes renowned for her psychological understanding of "The Transfiguration of the Commonplace." There is an undeniable appeal about escaping from the limits of mundane experience. This is the appeal of nineteenth-century romanticism, with its exaltation of the artist as one who is apart from society, a being more sensitive and suffering than others, who does not live by common standards. Muriel Spark repeatedly explored romanticism—and expressed antipathy to it.

Most members of the Brodie set—Eunice, Monica, Jenny, and Rose—grow beyond its narrow range into adults who are far less exotic and flamboyant than their mentor, but who live quietly and responsibly, able to resist impulses that would lead to the self-indulgences that destroy a perspective about human limitations. But Sandy, who is most like Jean Brodie, lacks such repose. In schoolgirl narratives, she casts herself as the heroine addressed by Alan Breck or Mr. Rochester or as the Lady of Shalott; she fantasizes about Pavlova's depending on her for the future of dance; she imagines herself as the right-hand woman of a mythical policewoman, in another fantasy that is a response to the ugly experience of Jenny's encounter with an exhibitionist. Even as a reclusive nun, she writes on the theme that has defined Jean Brodie's life and her own.

There are, of course, subtle differences. Sandy knows exactly what she is doing, while Jean Brodie is described as a kind of innocent. David Lodge has argued [in "The Uses and Abuses of Omniscience: Method and Meaning in Muriel Spark's *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie*," in The Novelist at the Crossroads, 1971] that the loss of primal innocence, the fallen world, is the subject of *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie*, and that Sandy must betray Miss Brodie because she has so many bad qualities mixed with the good traits of enthusiasm, inspiration, and individuality. But Sandy is not to be viewed without uneasiness; her hands "clutch the bars of her grille." She has withdrawn from the world; nevertheless, she has created a "set." Sister Helena's book has more ardent admirers than the selected schoolgirls at Marcia Blaine's School for Girls. Her reclusive life may be viewed as a renunciation of the world to parallel her teacher's renunciation of a lover, or as a penance for the betrayal. But even this does not work out according to plan, for she lacks the repose of the other nuns in the community. They notice her nervous tension and say that "Sister Helena had too much to bear from the world since she had published her psychological book which was so unexpectedly famed." Nevertheless, the dispensation that results in this exposure "was forced" upon her. Once again, Spark shows how separated human expectations are from the realities of experience.

The "prime" of life is supposed to be a time of realization, when the years of preparation and apprenticeship are turned into effective action, but the novella shows how far Jean Brodie is from such realization. The choice of the name "Brodie" is significant: Deacon William Brodie was an eighteenth-century man whose reality was very different from appearances; he was the historical source for Robert Louis Stevenson, another native of Edinburgh, whose classic creation of the "double life," is Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde. Publicly very respectable in civic and commercial enterprises, Deacon Brodie kept mistresses and conducted night burglaries. He died cheerfully on the gibbet, and his presence in Edinburgh remains very visible today. At the corner of the Royal Mile and Bank Street—in the Old Town that the Brodie set visit—stands Deacon Brodie's Tavern, an imposing institution that was founded in 1806. This is precisely the curious mixture of human experience that so fascinated Muriel Spark. Thus the name "Sandy Stranger" is also indicative, for it suggests both shifting uncertainties and the fundamental apartness of all people. Sandy is not simply the only English girl in the set, the exile in Scotland, and the favourite who becomes a betrayer. She is also the essential human being who may act, but with unanticipated results.

The unexpected is what should be expected. The most trusted girl, the confidante, is the betrayer. But Sandy insists that "It's only possible to betray where loyalty is due." And loyalty was due to Miss Brodie "only up to a point," so that "the word [betrayal] does not apply." Just after Miss Brodie asserts that Lowther would marry her, she reads of his engagement. Mary Macgregor was not kindly treated, but she remembers her days in Miss Brodie's class as the happiest of her life. One must retain "a sense of the hidden possibilities in all things," for there are always startling revelations. This view of the world can be frightening, for it shows the limits of man's control, his woeful inadequacy and the absurdity of pretensions. Many in the modern world find this a despairing view, but Muriel Spark's faith prevents that conclusion.

Her vision is not limited to this world, for her fiction has both a literal and an allegorical level. The realistic narrative of life in Edinburgh in the 1930s is cogent, but it is only a small part of a much larger scheme. Spark amuses by writing a story about schooldays; she invigorates a strong literary tradition of boys' stories (like Thomas Hughes' *Tom Brown's Schooldays* [1857] and William Golding's *The Lord of the Flies* [1955]) by making her subjects girls—and very sophisticated ones, too. She updates the classic nineteenth-century feminist heroine Jane Eyre—a shy, earnest, plain governess living in an isolated house—into a dynamic twentieth-century woman—an exotic, good-looking, assured, witty teacher who moves freely about a large city and holidays alone on the Continent. The characteristics of the male lovers are exactly paralleled to underscore the analogy with Charlotte Bronte's novel, which the girls also rewrite in their own style. Nevertheless, the literary exactness, like the realistic account, is not the essential concern.

The shifting time sequence serves not only as an effective device to encompass events occurring over twenty years and to keep the reader alert to many possibilities. It also functions significantly to throw human actions into a larger perspective. The events in the girls' lives appear quite different from one time to another. As Miss Brodie's students, the girls are fascinated and absorbed by her fantasies and those that they create in imitation. As adults they perceive these events as relatively unimportant. So all events of this life, even its prime, are recognized as very small when placed in the context of a universe that is God's complex creation. The incidental details may not always be understood, but for the person of faith there is a belief in a design that is not contingent upon merely human actions. Thus the resort to self-indulgent power is a grotesque distortion, important and yet trivial and absurdly laughable.

Muriel Spark's comic vision, then, is not only a dazzling exploitation of witty language and outrageous circumstances in the present world. It is also an extended view of how inconsequential are human assumptions of knowledge and power when viewed in the light of eternity. This is a wisdom not shared by Jean Brodie and Sandy Stranger; the beady eyes do not see so far, but the novelist's view is much deeper, and it is her own point of view that Muriel Spark offers her readers.

"*The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie*," in Muriel Spark, Frederick Ungar Publishing Co., 1984, pp. 16-28.

"*The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie* Spark, Muriel: Velma Bourgeois Richmond (essay date 1984)." Contemporary Literary Criticism. Ed. Brigham Narins. Vol. 94. Thomson Gale, 1997. eNotes.com. 2006. 29 Oct, 2006 <http://lit.enotes.com/contemporary-literary-criticism/prime-miss-jean-brodie-spark-muriel/velma-bourgeois-richmond-essay-date-1984>

Muriel Spark: ***The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie***

Three very different novelists … have one thing in common; an adult conversion to Roman Catholicism. They are Fionn MacColla, Muriel Spark and George Mackay Brown. Brown we must meantime leave to one side: his religious beliefs form an integral part of a personal vision of natural harmony in Greenvoe. Can anything useful be said in comparing such disparate novelists as MacColla and Spark? Well, both are concerned with Scottish Calvinism in their novels. MacColla reacted vigorously against an extreme Calvinist upbringing, and makes his critique of Calvinism central to all his novels. Spark, on the other hand, was raised in Edinburgh, with an English mother, a Jewish father and a conventionally Presbyterian schooling: perhaps like Stranger she missed having Calvinism to react against. But *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie* also centres on a critique of the impact of Calvinist thinking, and a magnificent reincarnation of the concept of the Justified Sinner.

Both novelists manage to raise an exceptionally wide range of issues in the apparently narrow contexts of their novels, and to view them in some sense sub specie aeternitatis. In both And the Cock Crew and *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie* there is treatment of religion, politics, history, sexuality and art—and the idea of betrayal is central to both. The betrayals in And the Cock Crew … are multiple, while the obvious case in *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie* is the betrayal of Jean Brodie by Sandy Stranger—with a clearly arguable prior betrayal of the set by Miss Brodie. MacColla and Spark both choose a central character who is in some sense 'of' the Calvinist enemy, and each treats this central character with sympathy and understanding, so that the character is eventually seen as both attractive and misguided: we remember Sandy and Jenny completing their literary rendition of the love letters of Miss Brodie and Gordon Lowther, finding it 'a delicate question how to present Miss Brodie in both a favourable and an unfavourable light, for now … nothing less than this was demanded.' MacColla's instinct is to go for the jugular, and so in his denunciation of the naysaying qualities of Scottish Calvinism he chooses as his central character a minister of the kirk: Spark also goes for a traditionally central element, education. But the differences are clearly much more striking. MacColla expresses his central interests by writing a historical novel which demonstrates to his satisfaction the historical ill effects of the naysaying of Calvinism on Scotland, while Spark expresses hers vitally in relation to her own century—indeed, to the city in which she spent her own school days—and the most important political movements of the time. Where MacColla is making a case, fairly clearly preaching, she is very 'laid back', and refuses to intrude judgements in her novel. And of course, most crucially, she transforms the traditional figure of the dominie into an unusual woman schoolteacher at a privileged girls' school.

All the same, perhaps these two novels have more to say than the others about the nature and character of the Calvinist tradition underlying Scottish life.

Spark refuses to intrude judgements, we say, but the matter is more complex than that. Can we find Muriel Spark anywhere in her fiction? Miss Jean Brodie seems to have two narrative centres, the developing consciousness of Sandy Stranger, and a third person narrator who is apparently uncommitted and factual. But we should not over-readily accept this appearance: Mrs Spark has commented on this problem, in a piece called ‘My Conversion’, published in 1961, the year of the novel:

With a novel, you know the dialogue. It belongs to each character. But the narrative part—first or third person—belongs to a character as well. I have to decide what the author of the narrative is like. It’s not me, it’s a character.

The narrator in this novel has a splendid sense of comedy, and is no respecter of persons; and the wit usually economically serves some satiric purpose or undermines a mood or attitude. Irony is pervasive. We can look at our first experience of the tale of Miss Brodie’s lost lover, Hugh. We are nowhere told that Miss Brodie is being wildly romantic and self-indulgent, with apparently no awareness of the realities of the war in which her lover died. Her own prose tells us this, as she starts with an unacknowledged quotation from Keats, ‘Season of mists and mellow fruitfulness’, and latches onto that alliterated ‘f’ sound to make Hugh’s death insubstantial, melancholy and beautiful: ‘He fell on Flanders’ Field…. He fell…. He fell like an autumn leaf.’ The narrator effectively punctures the mood while reinforcing the alliteration by referring to ‘the story of Miss Brodie’s felled fiancé’, while Miss Brodie, unheeding, goes on to describe Hugh, inevitably, as ‘one of the Flowers of the Forest’.

The witty comment can be lightly satirical in a religious dimension, as when gaunt mistresses say ‘good morning’ to Miss Brodie ‘with predestination in their smiles,’ or it can accumulate in gentle mockery of Miss Brodie’s behaviour and attitudes, as she declaims ‘The Lady of Shalott’ with a dedication worthy of Sybil Thorndike, and perhaps too many decibels: ‘Miss Brodie’s voice soared up to the ceiling, and curled round the feet of the Senior girls upstairs.’ Miss Brodie enjoins composure in the full flow of her peculiar declamatory speech—’It is one of the best assets of a woman, an expression of composure, come foul, come fair. Regard the Mona Lisa over yonder!’ The narrator punctures the mood again:

Mona Lisa in her prime smiled in steady composure even though she had just come from the dentist and her lower jaw was swollen.

The actual narration in the novel is sometimes direct from this ironic, witty but non-aggressive narrator, and often a rendition of Sandy’s thoughts by the narrator. Apart from the ubiquitous witty phrases, the narrator is usually careful not to comment. She (it is surely a woman?) stands back, never judging, and only occasionally offering analysis. We come to recognise these occasions as particularly important, from their very rarity, whether it be the context offered for Miss Brodie by the description of the ‘war-bereaved spinsterhood’ of Edinburgh, or the passages where the narrator looks closely at Miss Brodie and religion, or at Miss Brodie looking for a confidante, or at Sandy’s attempts to come to terms with religion.

Sandy emerges as a central consciousness in chapter two, and we gradually come to accept her as a fairly reliable guide, as we outgrow our distaste for her little piggy eyes—or indeed become irritated with the narrator for such insistence on them. Although we learn fairly early that it was Sandy who betrayed Miss Brodie, we do tend to trust her reactions to people, events, churches, only remaining slightly uneasy about her clutching the bars of the grille—from nervous tension? a false vocation? fear? guilt?

There are other specific narrative techniques which Spark utilises to help us in our understanding of the action: Muriel Spark's refusal to judge for us does not remove the necessity for judgement, but transfers it to the reader as part of the required response. The novel can be seen as a complex problem requiring solution, arranged in both a helpful and a challenging way to facilitate the reader's exercise of judgement.

The chief and most obtrusive of these techniques is to do with chronology. Conventional chronology is continually interrupted with glimpses of future occasions, and future assessments of present issues. Thus we find terrible ironies, for example in the case of Mary Macgregor. Mary is appallingly treated throughout the novel: the description 'the nagged child' is a gross understatement. But we know from the end of the first chapter that Mary will die in a fire at the age of twenty-three, and from the beginning of the next that she will look back on these days of bullying and victimisation as the happiest days of her life. This dismal irony is kept firmly in our awareness, just as Vonnegut keeps the doom of 'poor old Edgar Derby', shot for stealing a teapot in the ruins of Dresden, in the forefront of our consciousness from beginning to end of Slaughterhouse Five.

The departure from simple conventional chronology offers a picture of a developing scene: in the first chapter we meet the Brodie set at sixteen—and at ten. We gradually develop a double awareness, not particularly conscious or clear cut at the first reading, of the attractions of Miss Brodie to the ten-year-olds of 1930, and the dangers inherent in her and apparent to Sandy by 1938. In all this we get a lively sense of the whole of Jean Brodie's 'prime', and all sorts of ironies and insights are implicit in our early learning that Miss Brodie was betrayed, and that Sandy betrayed her, and in the retrospective conversations different members of the set have with Sandy in her convent throughout, given in 'flash-forward', as it were.

In fact, the departures from conventional chronology are fewer than at first appears, and almost always brief: the narrator employs the economy of method Sandy admires in the methods of Teddy Lloyd and Miss Brodie and employs herself in the betrayal. With the exceptions noted above, the novel progresses straightforwardly enough. After the introduction to the sixteen-year-olds, chapter one gives us the beginnings of the Brodie set and our introduction to this amazing teacher and her unconventional methods, and chapter two concentrates on the first year with Miss Brodie, especially the walk through old Edinburgh. Chapter three covers the second year with Miss Brodie, in more senses than one 'the sexual year', as the little girls are preoccupied with sexuality and Miss Brodie falls in love with one master and embarks on an affair with another. This emotional situation for Miss Brodie continues in chapter four, when the Brodie set moves up into the Senior school for session 1932–3. After this, things are telescoped: three years are virtually omitted, and chapter five deals with the girls in fourth year, 1935–36, while in chapter six at age eighteen Sandy leaves school, has her affair with Teddy Lloyd and betrays Miss Brodie.

Another very effective narrative device is juxtaposition of scenes or characters so that a vivid effect of comparison or ironic contrast can be created without overt comment. Early in the novel, the introduction of Miss Brodie is interrupted by a terse little paragraph about Marcia Blaine, founder of the school, like and unlike Miss Brodie. Widow to Miss Brodie's spinster, admirer of Italian patriot Garibaldi and his 'red shirts' to Miss Brodie's celebrator of Mussolini and his 'black shirts', Marcia Blaine is economically described by reference to her 'manly portrait'—Miss Brodie is the eternal feminine. The ethos of Marcia Blaine's school, with which Miss Brodie is so much at odds, is implicit in the Founder's Day bunch 'of hard-wearing flowers,' as well as the Bible text underlining a traditional notion of female virtue. (Incidentally, Mrs Spark has a little joke at our expense here: Blaine is an unusual surname, but a biographical dictionary may offer us a nineteenth-century American journalist and statesman called Blain, whose first names were James Gillespie. Spark herself attended James Gillespie's Girls' School in Edinburgh, and Marcia Blaine's is very clearly based on it.)

Again, in the walk in chapter two, Sandy's understanding of the set as 'a body with Miss Brodie for the head' is balanced by her vision of the queue of unemployed men as 'one dragon's body … the snaky creature,' and through her meditation we see the Brodie girls, the Girl Guides and Mussolini's fascisti as oddly similar. A final telling instance where juxtaposition lends resonance is in chapter three, everybody's 'sexual year'. After Jenny's experience with the 'terrible beast' who exposed himself, Sandy falls in love with her imagined image of Jenny's policewoman, whom she interestingly decides to call Sergeant Anne Grey, and in Sandy's fantasy the two set out, 'dedicated' (Sandy is not Miss Brodie's pupil for nothing) 'to eliminate sex from Edinburgh and environs.' This immediately precedes the scene where Miss Brodie and Teddy Lloyd have an implicitly charged conversation about Cramond, the home village of Gordon Lowther, and Miss Brodie puts her arm round Rose's shoulder and thanks Teddy Lloyd, 'as if she and Rose were one.' Thus early, and however unconsciously, while Sandy is reacting against sexuality, Miss Brodie is beginning to manipulate Rose into her own sexual fantasies. The comment through Sandy can apply to the juxtaposing technique as well as the developing relationship between teacher and pupil: it is both intriguing and forward-pointing:

Sandy was fascinated by this method of making patterns with facts, and was divided between her admiration for the technique and the pressing need to prove Miss Brodie guilty of misconduct.

The final specific technique we will point to here is the effect of introducing parallel situations. One central example should suffice. It is clear to most people reading the book that both Jean Brodie and Sandy Stranger to some extent lead fantasy lives, or double lives, It is made most clear in Sandy's case, where her imaginary life is a preventive for boredom, and is nourished for the most part by her reading—which is directed to a considerable extent by Miss Brodie. Apart from the joint literary compositions with Jenny, we are introduced to Sandy's double life in a bizarre conversation she holds with the Lady of Shalott, who bears, here, a certain resemblance to Miss Brodie (chanting in the classroom the while). Miss Brodie's choice of poem is significant, dealing as it does with a Lady who is destroyed by turning from shadow to reality. Sandy holds a series of romantic conversations with Alan Breck from Stevenson's Kidnapped, involved in quest and cause and chivalry, quite transfiguring the commonplace sections of the famous walk through old Edinburgh when she would otherwise have to attend to the tiresome Mary: the 'real life' fantasy here, of a married lady and her husband, is brief and comparatively very unsatisfactory. Later Sandy moves on to Mr Rochester: Miss Brodie has been reading out Jane Eyre during sewing lessons. And later still, after Miss Brodie's inspired teaching and a trip to the theatre, she moves on to Pavlova, and has a delicious conversation, one diva to another, soulful, melancholy, and irresistibly funny. Again Pavlova smacks of Miss Brodie, and much of the comic effect rises from that one extravagant detail, the claw:

> 'Sandy,' said Anna Pavlova, 'you are the only truly dedicated dancer, next to me. Your dying Swan is perfect, such a sensitive, final tap of the claw upon the floor of the stage….'

The last example of Sandy's fantasy life is her invention of Sergeant Anne Grey. The interesting things to notice are that Sandy seems always quite conscious of the difference between fantasy and reality, and that we see no more such fancies after she leaves the Junior school.

Miss Brodie's double life is less easy to chart, because we see her only from outside and from her speech, and it is harder to know when she is fantasising completely and when embroidering fact (as in the new picture of Hugh after her greater awareness of both Teddy Lloyd and Gordon Lowther). It does seem clear that she gradually drifts further into fantasy, and determines to make it into reality, when she determines to use Rose to sleep with Teddy Lloyd by proxy. And of course she leads a very conventional kind of 'double life' when she combines the roles of correct Edinburgh spinster schoolmistress and weekend lover to Gordon Lowther: this seems to cause her no trouble. She lays claim to the long tradition of double life or split personality in the Scottish Calvinist consciousness (e.g. Hogg's Justified Sinner, Stevenson's Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde) when she claims to be descended from one of the archetypes, Deacon Brodie. As she relates, Deacon Brodie was a pious and respected Edinburgh householder who had a conventional double life, keeping mistresses and indulging in cock-fighting, and he became a burglar by night for the sake of the excitement and danger involved, and died at last for these crimes on a gibbet he designed himself as justicer: 'it is the stuff I am made of', declares Miss Brodie. The character of Deacon Brodie for many years fascinated Robert Louis Stevenson, like Mrs Spark another notable exile from Edinburgh. He collaborated with Henley to write a play on Deacon Brodie, and this historical character lies behind his most famous novella of double life, The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde. Miss Brodie's double life is more subtle and much more alarming than Sandy's, and instead of growing out of it, like the little girl, she gets imperceptibly more enmeshed in a complex web of fact and fantasy, and a gradual determination to flesh out her fantasies.

But the notion of a double life does not finish with Sandy and Miss Brodie. Oscar Wilde wrote an essay called 'Pen, Pencil and Poison', about a poet and painter, Thomas Wainewright, who was also a forger and a secret poisoner. Teddy Lloyd's double life is by no means as sensational as this, but it lasts over years and bears some little resemblance to Wainewright's. Wilde quotes a Zola murderer who paints respectable people so that they all bear a curious resemblance to his victim; and he says that Wainewright put the expression of his own wickedness into the portrait of a nice young girl. Teddy Lloyd surely owes something to Wainewright and Zola, as he turns out portrait after portrait of the Brodie set, each bearing an uncanny resemblance to Miss Brodie, each secretly confessing his fascination with her. Sandy precipitates her affair with him when she shocks him by claiming that 'all his portraits, even that of the littlest Lloyd baby, were now turning out to be likenesses of Miss Brodie,' suggesting that Miss Brodie has completely taken over life and art; and it is Sandy's curiosity about Teddy Lloyd's secret love for Miss Brodie that is central to her interest in him, before she is infected by his Catholicism. If we begin to see double lives everywhere, it is not necessarily just our imagination: in an interview with Frank Kermode Mrs Spark acknowledges this tendency:

> When I become interested in a subject, say old age, then the world is peopled for me—just peopled with them…. They're the centre of the world, and everyone else is on the periphery. It is an obsession…. And that's how I see things. I wrote a book about bachelors, and it seemed to me that everyone was a bachelor.

And so we find poor Gordon Lowther attempting to sustain the same relatively mundane double life as Miss Brodie, on the one hand teacher, church elder and choir-master, on the other hand Miss Brodie's secret lover. But there is no hint of the stuff of Deacon Brodie in Gordon Lowther: he does not relish his secret life, and would always have preferred to marry Miss Brodie. At last his melancholy outweighs 'her bed-fellowship and her catering,' and he settles for a straightforward married life with Miss Lockhart. Retrospectively, even Mary Macgregor can be seen to have lived a double life at school: her life has been fairly intolerable throughout, but as a young adult she remembers Miss Brodie's class, and its magic for her lay in 'all those stories and opinions which had nothing to do with the ordinary world': Miss Brodie herself was Mary's brief double life. And everything comes to have at least two aspects, not only Miss Brodie but the city of Edinburgh itself. This is summed up in a telling description of Sandy's different attitudes over years to images of Miss Brodie:

> Sandy felt warmly towards Miss Brodie at those times when she saw how she was misled in her idea of Rose. It was then that Miss Brodie looked beautiful and fragile, just as dark heavy Edinburgh itself could suddenly be changed into a floating city when the light was a special pearly white and fell upon one of the gracefully fashioned streets. In the same way Miss Brodie's masterful features became clear and sweet to Sandy when viewed in the curious light of the woman's folly, and she never felt more affection for her in her later years than when she thought upon Miss Brodie as silly.

This profound ambiguity is central to the effect of the book: no simple attitude toward Miss Brodie can last with any justice.

And no simple picture of Miss Brodie emerges from the brief novel: however briefly, she is supplied with suggested and suggestive contexts in culture, art and history, in religion, in matters particularly Scottish or typically Edinburgh, in the politics and life of her time. Perhaps the outstanding of these suggested dimensions is the one which typifies her notions of virtue and dedication and heroism and goes far to explain her devotion to Mussolini and his fascisti, her ideal of Italy throughout history, stemming from ancient Rome.

Her first appearance in the novel is when she interrupts the set, aged sixteen, talking to boys at the school gates, and informs them of ‘a new plot’ to force her to resign. The understanding girls, who have clearly heard such things before, react to her appearance and their notion of her character in terms she has no doubt taught them:

She looked a mighty woman with her dark Roman profile in the sun. The Brodie set did not for a moment doubt that she would prevail. As soon expect Julius Caesar to apply for a job at a crank school as Miss Brodie. She would never resign. If the authorities wanted to get rid of her she would have to be assassinated.

The image is unexpected, forceful, and a shade ominous—and Caesar was betrayed by a set including his most trusted friend.

There are a few other memorable ancient Roman moments. Miss Brodie tells her class about an Italian holiday, reliving her scorn of the vulgar American tourists and her own excitement at seeing ‘the Colosseum where the gladiators died and the slaves were thrown to the lions.’ Recreating that memory, she again appears in ancient Roman guise to the girls, until she herself destroys the mood:

Miss Brodie stood in her brown dress like a gladiator with raised arm and eyes flashing like a sword. ‘Hail Caesar!’ she cried again, turning radiantly to the window light, as if Caesar sat there. ‘Who opened the window?’ said Miss Brodie dropping her arm.

Nobody answered.

‘Whoever has opened the window has opened it too wide,’ said Miss Brodie. ‘Six inches is perfectly adequate.’

Here the ancient Roman Miss Brodie and the archetypally Edinburgh Miss Brodie uneasily co-exist. She has a ‘fine dark Roman head’: ‘her dead Hugh had admired her head for its Roman appearance,’ and there is another splendid image of Miss Brodie in Teddy Lloyd’s presence: she ‘seated herself nobly like Britannia with her legs apart under her loose brown skirt which came well over her knees.’ A few pages later, as Miss Brodie encounters unpleasant colleagues, the image of patrician Roman heroine and warrior is still about her:

‘Good mawning,’ she replied, in the corridors, flattening their scorn beneath the chariot wheels of her superiority, and deviating her head towards them no more than an insulting half-inch.

Till the end of the set’s schooldays, ‘Miss Brodie as a Roman matron’ remains an important image.

Her ardent admiration for the antique Roman past is complemented by Miss Brodie’s devotion, shared by Teddy Lloyd, to Italian art through the ages. So the girls are offered Italian paintings as well as pictures of Mussolini’s fascisti as holiday trove. They are made familiar with the Italian Renaissance and the Mona Lisa, and instructed that the greatest Italian painter is not Leonardo but Giotto, because he is Miss Brodie's favourite. For Miss Brodie, Mussolini is a natural and admirable part of her Italian ideal. She admires what he seems to stand for, dedication and discipline, efficiency, elimination of unemployment, and his charisma, and she apparently remains blissfully unaware of the bullying tactics he and his henchmen ruthlessly employed. It is easy for us, of course, with benefit of hindsight, to blame an Edinburgh school-teacher for admiring Mussolini and his followers in 1930: a great many better informed people than Jean Brodie shared her admiration at the time. During the walk through Edinburgh we are made particularly conscious of the impact Mussolini has made on both Sandy and Miss Brodie: the event is mainly seen from Sandy's viewpoint, but we can distinguish clearly what she has been and is being taught by Miss Brodie from her new reflections on it.

We begin with Sandy's understanding of the corporate unity of teacher and girls, 'a body with Miss Brodie for the head', the girls as if created to fulfil Miss Brodie's purpose. Miss Brodie's clear dislike of Girl Guides 'with their regimented vigorous look' prompts Sandy to remember her paradoxical admiration for Mussolini's marching troops. Sandy ponders on juxtaposed set, Guides and fascisti: and she sees

> that the Brodie set was Miss Brodie's fascisti, not to the naked eye, marching along, but all knit together for her need and in another way, marching along.

At this stage Sandy obviously understands even less than Miss Brodie what Mussolini is up to: he 'had put an end to unemployment with his fascisti and there was no litter in the streets'. The resemblance is in the discipline, the perfect way in which the troops are bent to the will of the leader. And so it does seem paradoxical that the marching Guides are disapproved, until Sandy begins to suspect jealousy: the Guides are 'too much of a rival fascisti, and Miss Brodie could not bear it'. On the walk Sandy experiences two early temptations to 'betray' Miss Brodie, one by being nice to Mary Macgregor and one here by joining the Brownies, but she recoils from them quickly. Her basic reason is interesting, because this is the only time it is ever put in terms as strong as love: 'Then the group-fright seized her again, and it was necessary to put the idea aside, because she loved Miss Brodie.'

Now her reactions are to be further tested, by the walk through the previously unvisited slums, 'Sandy's first experience of a foreign country': she is to have her first intimation of the real meaning of unemployment, as she shrinks fearfully from the 'snaky creature', the queue of unemployed. They are first glimpsed, talking, spitting and smoking, and Miss Brodie enjoins the set to pray for the Unemployed, repeating the conventional wisdom that, 'In Italy the unemployment problem has been solved.' It is a powerful argument, faced with Edinburgh reality. Again the men talk and spit a great deal, reinforcing negatively the famous dictum of Lord Howard of Penrith in 1923, as blinkered as Miss Brodie: 'Under Fascism, Italians no longer spit in public.' Sandy's discomfort and fear are acute here: when she betrays Miss Brodie she disclaims interest in 'world affairs', but she remains concerned about Edinburgh's poor and unemployed: 'It did not seem necessary that the world should be saved, only that the poor people in the streets and slums of Edinburgh should be relieved.' Again now she experiences the impulse to desert the set and this time she acts on it, home being the necessary warm notion to oppose to her shivering cold and fear—but she rather repents her self-exile from tea at Miss Brodie's shortly after.

It is of course possible that the reader knows a little more about Fascism than Miss Brodie and Sandy, and Spark gives oblique hints for such readers. Mussolini preached the superficially attractive idea of a corporate state, in which unions, employers and all worked and collaborated together: it is not wholly unlike Miss Brodie's benign dictatorship over her girls, and is lightly referred to here when Sandy finds 'the corporate Brodie set' insufficiently warm.

But Miss Brodie's Fascism is basically very simple-minded and straightforward. After her next summer holiday in Italy she tells the girls; 'Mussolini has performed feats of magnitude and unemployment is even farther abolished under him than it was last year.' Her devotion persists until she transfers it, in 1933, to Hitler:

a prophet-figure like Thomas Carlyle, and more reliable than Mussolini; the German brown-shirts, she said, were exactly the same as the Italian black, only more reliable.

Notice that she seems unaware of the racial persecution in Hitler's Nazism which was not inherent in Mussolini's Fascism. Hitler's methods again resemble her own, arguably, in that some historians say that his singling out and persecution of the Jews helped unite and cement the relieved majority of the Germans thereby passed over: Miss Brodie's outrageous picking on Mary Macgregor and making her a scapegoat has something of the same effect. In chapter three when the class gets sex-conscious giggles, Miss Brodie ejects Mary, one of the last to laugh, and shuts her out:

returning as one who had solved the whole problem. As indeed she had, for the violent action sobered the girls and made them feel that, in the official sense, an unwanted ring-leader had been apprehended and they were no longer in the wrong.

Nazi or not, this is acutely unpleasant behaviour. Miss Brodie may be a born Fascist, as Sandy claims, but she is an instinctive and a relatively uncomprehending one: before the war she is sure Hitler will save the world, and afterwards she innocently admits: 'Hitler was rather naughty,' surely one of the great understatements!

The Italy that has become home to Mrs Spark attracts Jean Brodie almost totally: she is under the spell of its art, history, tradition and contemporary politics—all but the church: she rejects Roman Catholicism, and the narrator suggests that that was the one church which might have 'normalized' her. Miss Brodie is not averse to meeting the Pope. That was part of her Italian holiday, and her Presbyterian soul was satisfied by her bending over the Pope's ring but not kissing it. This was part of her visit to Rome, as her London stay was marked by a visit to A A Milne, the creator of Pooh and Piglet. But the narrator pauses on her rejection of Roman Catholicism. The long paragraph begins by detailing the rota of different denominations she did accept and patronise, indicating at the least an indifference to sectarian strictness. Her rejection of Roman Catholicism is arguably as simple-minded and ignorant as her approval of Mussolini: it is a middle-class Edinburgh belief that the Church of Rome was a church of superstition, ‘and that only people who did not want to think for themselves were Roman Catholics’. The narrator suggests that only the Roman Catholic Church truly suited her temperament: ‘Possibly it could have embraced, even while it disciplined, her soaring and diving spirit, it might even have normalized her.’ The implication seems to be that the Roman Church provides norms, provides in its rituals and regularities, doctrines and hierarchies a stable framework for the extreme individual to respond to: Calvinist ideas, in part born from a reaction against the notion of a priesthood coming between the individual and God, can help the extremist toward her extremity.

MacColla’s critique of Calvinism … concentrated on the doctrine of the total depravity of man and human society, and his belief in the life-denying consequences of such a doctrine. Spark in contrast concentrates on the doctrine of election and subsequent dangers of antinomianism, as Hogg did in the Justified Sinner, and Burns in Holy Willie’s Prayer. The problem about predestination to grace, about election, is that, as the Justified Sinner found, it is difficult to be sure one is of the Elect. The temptation, as he also found, is that once convinced of his or her election to salvation, the individual can see him- or herself as above the law thereafter, bound for Heaven irrespective of behaviour in this world. This is antinomianism (i.e. flouting the principle of law,—anti plus Greek nomos, law). We seem to recognise this syndrome, for example, when Miss Brodie sees Rose as Venus incarnate, and above the moral laws.

Here we are told that Miss Brodie persists in her non-Roman rota of church visits with a sublime confidence in her own status:

She was not in any doubt, she let everyone know she was in no doubt, that God was on her side whatever her course, and so she experienced no difficulty or sense of hypocrisy in worship while at the same time she went to bed with the singing master.

Not only that, but she assumes the election of all her girls also:

The side-effects of this condition were exhilarating to her special girls in that they in some way partook of the general absolution she had assumed to herself…. All the time they were under her influence she and her actions were outside the context of right and wrong.

From the beginning she has promised to make her girls members of ‘life’s élite, or, as one might say, the crème de la crème’. And as time goes on by her special attentions and confidences she makes them ‘feel chosen’. So Miss Brodie elects herself and her girls—as Sandy at last perceives, she has a God-complex:

She thinks she is Providence, thought Sandy, she thinks she is the God of Calvin, she sees the beginning and the end.

It is all of course a million miles away from orthodox Calvinism, where the election is from God, and the part of the individual is to wait humbly and fearfully. Mrs Spark is criticising the effects of Calvinism, but by no means suggesting that

Miss Brodie is a representative Calvinist. She does not know God through the Scriptures as the Reformers insisted, but by the wrong and dangerous means of unassisted reason and private revelation.

Miss Brodie's religion is not in the end Christian at all. It is in the end personal and perverse, a monstrosity of egotism. Early on she applies Calvinist ideas to artists and outstanding personages: Florence Nightingale, Cleopatra, Helen of Troy, Sybil Thorndyke the great actress, Pavlova—these are above the despised 'team spirit', which is only for lesser mortals: effectively, they are above the law. So Miss Brodie takes all the furniture of Calvinism, so to speak, all the formulations and habits of mind, and applies it to her blurred perception of reality and fantasy. She never shows any sign of seriously believing that God exists or that she herself could be so lowly a thing as a creature. Is she 'quite an innocent in her way', as Sandy later on suggests, or is this outlandish pride, the sin whereby the angels fell?

Italy, Fascism, the Christian churches; these are perhaps the main contexts outside the school in which Miss Brodie is presented, but there are others. There are the women she most admires, those just listed, plus the Queen of England, Joan of Arc and Britannia. There is her favourite reading, and the authors she quotes without acknowledgement: they show no bias toward religion, unless a religion of art, including chiefly Keats, Tennyson, Pater, Rossetti, Swinburne, the early Yeats and Charlotte Brontë. There is her contempt for contemporary British politics, whether of right or left, in comparison with Mussolini. Miss Mackay admires Stanley Baldwin, the Conservative Prime Minister who presided over the General Strike of 1926, and was premier of a coalition government when the Brodie set was in the Junior school, but Miss Brodie does not—and posterity admits that Baldwin was no match for the ruthless challenge of Fascist dictatorships abroad. Miss Brodie also prefers Mussolini to the Scottish Labour politician Ramsay MacDonald, who formed a National Government with mainly Conservative support in opposition to most of his own party in 1931, when the girls were eleven.

What we get is a real flavour of the 'thirties, the more effective in that we are repeatedly reminded that it is the period between two wars, with reference to the 'felled fiancé' and 'war-bereaved spinsters', and flashes forward to the aftermath of the Second World War. And we see Miss Brodie in the context of her fellow spinsters, and of the fads and trivia of the time, and of her own idiosyncrasies. We (and the Brodie set) hear of the Buchmanites, followers of an American evangelist, and we hear of Marie Stopes, the great pioneer of birth control. Marie Stopes was another remarkable woman: at thirty-eight, virgin and with a divorce behind her, she wrote her classic manual Married Love from books—and like Miss Brodie, she was Edinburgh-born.

The endearing nature of Miss Brodie's Edinburgh-based mentality is seen when her notion of the near-unrefusable proposer of marriage is 'the Lord Lyon King-of-Arms': the Lord Lyon King-of-Arms is king in a Scottish context only, and in the most limited of ways: he is chief heraldic royal officer-of-arms, for ceremonial purposes. This can [be] seen as a harmless little limitation, linking Miss Brodie back to her Edinburgh context. There are several other instances of this: Eunice may not do cart-wheels at Sunday tea-parties, 'for in many ways Miss Brodie was an Edinburgh spinster of the deepest dye,' and we have quoted above her anti-climactic interruption of her gladiatorial fantasy to complain that the window has been opened to a 'vulgar' extent. Another such instance interrupts even the affecting story of the felled fiancé; and the comic effect is considerable:

… he fell on Flanders' Field,' said Miss Brodie. 'Are you thinking, Sandy, of doing a day's washing?'

'No, Miss Brodie.'

'Because you have got your sleeves rolled up. I won't have to do with girls who roll up the sleeves of their blouses, however fine the weather. Roll them down at once, we are civilized beings. He fell the week before Armistice….

The city of Edinburgh is also very important in the novel, and the old churches and the castle are omnipresent. And this is in no way surprising: Mrs Spark [as quoted by Alan Bold in Modern Scottish Literature, 1983] admits to a more pervasive influence:

But Edinburgh where I was born and my father was born has had an effect on my mind, my prose style and my ways of thought.

So, unobtrusively, Mrs Spark supplies a vivid context of the time and the character of her main protagonist. The novel may centre on the influence of one spinster school-teacher on six little girls, in a middle-class, all-female school in a city some have suggested is hardly part of Scotland at all, but the subject matter turns out to be wide-ranging, and the issues universal.

But the school is also and always credible, and with great economy as ever the narrator informs us right at the start about the general knowledge of the Brodie set when it moved up into the Senior school. The headmistress describes them as 'vastly informed on a lot of subjects irrelevant to the authorized curriculum, and useless to the school as a school'. The list includes elements of very different importance, world affairs, skin care and puberty, as well as Einstein and 'the arguments of those who consider the Bible to be untrue'. It is implied what Miss Mackay would rather have them know, and the authorised curriculum sounds on the dull side: 'They knew the rudiments of astrology but not the date of the Battle of Flodden or the capital of Finland.'

We get several glimpses of Miss Brodie teaching, and by no means all are in the classroom: if she is not settled under the elm tree with the English grammars open as a cover, making the little girls weep at the sad fate of her war-slain Hugh, she is likely to be taking them to the theatre, or an art gallery, or on that most significant landmark in Sandy's education, the walk through the old Edinburgh of the castle, the cathedral and the slums. Her teaching is certainly unorthodox, and the girls are unaware how unusual the relaxed atmosphere of her class is until her disappearance with Mr Lowther for a fortnight precipitates them into the untender mercies of Miss Gaunt. Miss Brodie's class is remarkable for absolutes and large understandings which most of us may not associate with school at all, as when Miss Brodie declares: 'Art is greater than science. Art comes first, and then science.' She turns back to the geography map, but turns again to the girls to amplify: 'Art and religion first; then philosophy; lastly science. That is the order of the great subjects of life, that's their order of importance.' And in spite of her dictatorial ways, the class is at ease:

'We do a lot of what we like in Miss Brodie's class,' Jenny said. 'My mummy says Miss Brodie gives us too much freedom.'

'She's not supposed to give us freedom, she's supposed to give us lessons,' said Sandy.

Our last set-piece of Miss Brodie's teaching is on her return from an Italian holiday in 1931, when she brings them a Cimabue and a new picture of Mussolini's fascisti, and details of all her summer experiences and a reiteration of her famous belief in education as a leading out, 'from e, out and duco, I lead': nonetheless, she immediately continues: 'Qualifying examination or no qualifying examination, you will have the benefit of my experiences in Italy.' She gets carried away as a gladiator, and returned to Edinburgh spinsterhood by an unduly open window, and back to the romantic subject of Rossetti and Swinburne: no wonder the two new girls stand up 'with wide eyes!'

Is there any harm in all this? One is tempted to say no, or to argue that any harm is well compensated for by the interest and liveliness of it all: Eunice later describes Miss Brodie as 'an Edinburgh Festival all on her own.' The girls do scrape through the momentous qualifying examination, with a great deal of extra knowledge, some very bizarre, and an inevitably blurred notion of where truth ends and Miss Brodie's opinion begins. They are enthralled by her personality: in term time she seems the centre of their lives. Being a member of Miss Brodie's set seems the most entertaining possibility by a long way, in the Junior school at Marcia Blaine. Arguably, no harm would have come to the girls if Miss Brodie had let them go when they moved up to Senior school, but her hanging on to the girls, keeping and building on her influence with them—this was where the whole thing began to be out of hand. The evidence of the book indicates that all the Brodie set except Sandy shook off her influence in the end without much trouble: but the example of Joyce Emily Hammond shows in a very dramatic way how dangerous that influence could be.

So we come at last to consider the most enigmatic character in the book, Sandy Stranger, the girl who loved Miss Brodie, fantasised about her, wrote of her love life, and deduced its real life character; who was Miss Brodie's confidante, her proxy lover of Teddy Lloyd and her betrayer, who became a Roman Catholic to Miss Brodie's bafflement and a nun to her hurt despair. Although we see a great deal of her thought processes, Sandy remains for us ultimately, as her name suggests, a stranger. We do not see all of her thought processes, and as she grows up we seldom learn of her emotional state, and so her character is very much open to different interpretation by the individual reader—so that Maurice Lindsay in his History of Scottish Literature can describe her betrayal of Miss Brodie as motivated by 'bitchy jealousy', while Peter Kemp attributes it to 'a strong moral sense'. In part it depends what emotional life the reader supplies for Sandy. 'She loved Miss Brodie' during the walk in chapter two, when this love is sufficient to quash temptations to join the Brownies or be nice to Mary—but it is a ten-year-old's understanding of love, which we can hardly rely on completely. Much later we see her bored and afflicted by the betrayed Miss Brodie, nostalgically remembering 'the first and unbetrayable Miss Brodie,' and one general passage indicates warmth and affection toward Miss Brodie whenever she was seen as fallible. But it is not a lot to go on. In general, we are unclear as to her feelings for Miss Brodie, and her feelings for Teddy Lloyd, and her feelings about her conversion to Roman Catholicism and her vocation to the convent: all we have is that repeated image of her hands clutching at the grille: the enigma persists.

Sandy's conversion is something we sense as crucially important to the book, but we are told very little about it, and what we know is cerebral or psychological; that she was interested in Teddy Lloyd's mind because he was so obsessed with the ridiculous Miss Brodie, that when she lost interest in him as a man, she retained interest in the mind, and eventually extracted his faith. But this submerged conversion matters, as does Caroline's conversion in *The Comforters* (1957), or the bizarre conversion and eventual martyrdom of Nicholas Farringdon in *The Girls of Slender Means* (1963), the novel after *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie*. Sandy's situation is after all a little like what we know of Spark's: both were born and raised in Edinburgh but not entirely of it, within a couple of years of each other, and both had an English mother. Spark's father was Jewish, which helped separate her from a conventional middle-class Edinburgh situation: we hear nothing about Sandy's father, but home is a very warm and comforting notion. Both were educated in the same Presbyterian school, and neither exactly had Scottish Calvinism sternly presented to her, to react against: instead, Sandy had Miss Brodie. Both eventually became converts to Roman Catholicism. All sorts of intriguing questions about Sandy's young adulthood and conversion remain tantalisingly unanswerable—how important was Miss Brodie's adamant opposition to Catholicism to Sandy's eventual acceptance of it? How important was the notion of rivalry with Miss Brodie in her love affair with Teddy Lloyd? Or was it important, mainly, just to frustrate Miss Brodie's plans and roles for Rose and Sandy, to thwart her?

Sandy emerges as a central consciousness in chapter two, with her birthday party à deux with Jenny and her insights during the walk. But from the beginning her too-often-insisted-on tiny eyes are on Miss Brodie, scrutinising her chest and noting its different appearances. The collaborative writings with Jenny inevitably centre on Miss Brodie, and they mirror very accurately the changes in the set generally indicated by the narrator. In the first year with Miss Brodie they are essentially little girls, with only the beginnings of the following year's sexual obsession, so The Mountain Eyrie, the continuing story of Miss Brodie and Hugh, rings hollow with melodramatic romance. But in the 'sexual year' the set senses the onset of sexual awareness between Miss Brodie and Teddy Lloyd and Gordon Lowther before any of the teachers do, and when Miss Brodie and Gordon Lowther disappear from school for the same fortnight, it is Sandy who casually suggests an affair, 'merely in order to break up the sexless gloom that surrounded them,' and then she suspects that the affair exists in fact. She is of course only eleven, and subject to the onset of adolescence like any other little girl, so it would be dangerous to make too much of her ambiguous attitude towards sexuality at this time. While in fantasy with Sergeant Anne Grey she was dedicated to eliminate sex from Edinburgh and environs, she was very excited and interested in Monica Douglas's story that she has witnessed a kiss between Miss Brodie and Teddy Lloyd, 'excited and desperately trying to prove the report true by eliminating the doubts'. Sandy is only typical of the set in her interest in Miss Brodie's changed appearance, and fantasies about the possibility of her engaging in sexual activity, and she is still sharing them with Jenny, but her thoughts gradually become more private. It is Sandy alone who looks at Miss Brodie as she looks at Rose 'in a special way' when Teddy Lloyd has remarked on her profile, though she and Jenny continue to speculate on whether Miss Brodie can be desirable to men. And it is Sandy alone who attempts to detect 'any element of surrender about her' in the affair with Gordon Lowther, although Sandy and Jenny collaborate on the outspoken and highly comic fictional correspondence.

Sandy was only eighteen when she finally betrayed Miss Brodie, but the seeds were sown long before. In a sense they were sown by Miss Brodie herself, in her constant raising of the possibility—or impossibility: 'I do not think ever to be betrayed.' But it is when the girls are fifteen that Sandy begins to feel that 'the Brodie set, not to mention Miss Brodie herself, was getting out of hand.' She has discovered the weird phenomenon of Teddy Lloyd's paintings, that all portraits of Brodie girls come to resemble Miss Brodie herself. It is when her little eyes meet his 'with the near-blackmailing insolence of her knowledge' that he kisses her, an important moment, balancing the solitary kiss Monica Douglas witnessed between Lloyd and Miss Brodie. Not surprisingly this, and Lloyd's cruel comment that Sandy is 'just about the ugliest little thing I've ever seen in my life', leave her in some confusion. At about this time, Miss Brodie has begun to look for a confidante: she

was in fact now on the look-out for a girl amongst her set in whom she could confide entirely, whose curiosity was greater than her desire to make a sensation outside, and who, in the need to gain further confidences from Miss Brodie, would never betray what had been gained.… Almost shrewdly, Miss Brodie fixed on Sandy,….

A round of golf full of bunkers and power images is the setting for the first confidences, and they seem harmless enough, reasons why Miss Brodie has no great ambitions for the set, except Sandy and Rose. Obliquely and then directly, Sandy begins to understand:

It was plain that Miss Brodie wanted Rose with her instinct to start preparing to be Teddy Lloyd's lover, and Sandy with her insight to act as informant on the affair. It was to this end that Rose and Sandy had been chosen as the crème de la crème. There was a whiff of sulphur about the idea which fascinated Sandy in her present mind. After all, it was only an idea.

The Sandy who feels deprived of Calvinism, 'something definite to reject', is tempted by the whiff of sulphur here, and 'for over a year Sandy entered into the spirit of this plan.' She enjoys the long temptation shared. But Sandy was always more a realist than Miss Brodie, could always more clearly discriminate between fantasy and reality. So one day in her sixth year Sandy fully realises the extent and nature of Miss Brodie's manipulative plan:

All at once Sandy realised that this was not all theory and a kind of Brodie game.… But this was not theory; Miss Brodie meant it. Sandy looked at her, and perceived that the woman was obsessed by the need for Rose to sleep with the man she herself was in love with; there was nothing new in the idea, it was the reality that was new.

Miss Brodie's plan is serious, and Sandy has connived at it, feeding her unreality: 'She had told Miss Brodie how peculiarly all his portraits reflected her. She had said so time and again, for Miss Brodie loved to hear it.'

That summer Sandy leaves school, and while Miss Brodie is in Germany and Austria and Deirdre Lloyd and the children are in the country, Sandy seduces Teddy Lloyd by a repetition of her 'insolent blackmailing stare' and her knowledge of Lloyd's obsession with Miss Brodie. We have little detail, but both Sandy and Teddy Lloyd seem more interested in Miss Brodie than in each other. That curiosity which Miss Brodie required in a confidante is Sandy's main spur: 'The more she discovered him to be still in love with Jean Brodie, the more she was curious about the mind that loved the woman.' And when she loses interest in Lloyd in due course she retains her fascination with his religion: 'She left the man and took his religion and became a nun in the course of time.' Arguably, Sandy has already twice betrayed Miss Brodie, in embracing the art master, contrary to the terms of the plan, and in embracing his religion, which Miss Brodie so despises. But it is doubtful if she would ever have betrayed her to Miss Mackay had it not been for Miss Brodie's utterly casual throwaway remark about Joyce Emily.

The much expelled Joyce Emily has been present from chapter one, anxious to join the sixteen-year-old Brodie set, who are too preoccupied to bother with her. So, perhaps a little through their faults, Joyce Emily is taken up by Miss Brodie. For the most part the reader, like the set, knows little about Joyce Emily and cares less. We do know that she has a brother fighting in the Spanish Civil War and wants to go too: we know that she is anti-Franco. We learn that she ran away to Spain and was killed in an accident. And in Miss Brodie's throwaway remark we learn a little more:

> sometimes I regretted urging young Joyce Emily to go to Spain to fight for Franco, she would have done admirably….

Sandy checks that Joyce Emily went to fight for the Fascist Franco, and Miss Brodie agrees: 'I made her see sense.' It is difficult to know which outrages our expectations of a schoolteacher more, talking the girl into changing sides in the war, or 'urging' her to go and fight at all. Both betray a terrifying unconscious egotism which sees Joyce Emily as a pawn rather than a human being, fulfilling a minor ambition of Miss Brodie's, as Rose was intended to fulfil a major one. The juxtaposition of this conversation with Sandy's betrayal clearly indicates that this discovery about Joyce Emily finally triggered the betrayal, Sandy's determination to 'put a stop to Miss Brodie.'

The betrayal itself was a sordid affair which Sandy clearly did not enjoy. Miss Mackay was ready with questions about Miss Brodie's sex life. It is a nice irony that Sandy impeaches Miss Brodie for teaching Fascism although it is 'a side interest': it was a side interest in Sandy's experience of Miss Brodie, but a very central and final one for Joyce Emily.

It is easy to understand why Sandy felt is necessary to 'put a stop to Miss Brodie', and the narrator adds an implication of the 'strong moral sense' pointed to by Peter Kemp: 'She was more fuming, now, with Christian morals, than John Knox.'

The question that is never directly answered is whether Sandy continued to feel justified in the betrayal. References to her later life in the convent and visits from various members of the set are sprinkled through the novel, and the conversations always centre on Miss Brodie and the betrayal. We would suggest that Sandy attains some wisdom, some detachment in the years in the convent when she writes her psychological treatise on 'The Transfiguration of the Commonplace'—although how much that owed to Miss Brodie it is impossible to say. There is no evidence that she regretted the betrayal, ever felt it had been unnecessary, though the cumulative evidence suggests that retrospectively she began to revalue Miss Brodie's positive side. She has accumulated a lot of information. Monica visits Sandy in the late 1950s, and asserts that she really did witness the Brodie/Lloyd kiss; and we learn that Sandy knew this 'even before Miss Brodie had told her so one day after the end of the war': presumably Sandy had been confided in by Teddy Lloyd as well.

These convent interviews years after Miss Brodie's death show us also the continuing naïveté of the other members of the set. It is of all people Rose who innocently asks 'Why did she get the push? Was it sex?' And it is Monica who asks Sandy if Rose ever did sleep with Teddy Lloyd, and who ruminates that if Miss Brodie and Teddy Lloyd were in love, 'it was a real renunciation in a way'—although in the past they saw the renunciation claims as comic. Eunice recalls Miss Brodie as marvellous fun, and Jenny wishes she could tell Miss Brodie about her sudden falling in love: 'Miss Brodie would have liked to know about it, sinner as she was.' And that is the point at which Sandy famously replies: 'Oh, she was quite an innocent in her way.' Perhaps the best way to understand this is that Sandy has become able to separate the evil Miss Brodie was undoubtedly doing in the 'extremities' of her late prime from her inability to realise this evil or to will it as such. But it is also another of her enigmatic utterances, for 'an innocent' can mean many things, from 'an innocent or guiltless person' through 'a young child' and 'a guileless, simple or unsuspecting person' to 'one wanting in ordinary knowledge or intelligence; a simpleton, a silly fellow'.

At her worst, Miss Brodie is simple-minded: if she can see no harm in changing Joyce Emily's politics and packing her off to war, to fulfil by proxy her own aim of dedication, she is seriously lacking in the insight on which she prides herself. Her ambitions for her girls were always alarming, if one took them seriously, because her imagination fed her ideal of dedication with a highly coloured extremism—so, when Eunice had a religious phase Miss Brodie 'tried to inspire Eunice to become at least a pioneer missionary in some deadly and dangerous zone of the earth' rather than a Girl Guide leader in the respectable Edinburgh suburb of Corstorphine. The only moment at which Miss Brodie has enough insight to suspect Sandy is when she is angry at the news that Sandy has entered the convent. She has hardly learned from the betrayal if a few weeks before she dies she can respond to such news thus:

> What a waste. That is not the sort of dedication I meant. Do you think she has done this to annoy me? I begin to wonder if it was not Sandy who betrayed me.

Any woman who can seriously think another may have entered a convent to 'annoy' her has perhaps a lopsided view of the universe: perhaps Sandy was right: 'She thinks she is Providence. She thinks she is the God of Calvin.'

The book ends with Sandy in the convent, now for at least a dozen years Sister Helena of the Transfiguration. The Roman Empress Dowager Helena, mother of Constantine, was reputedly British—said indeed to be the daughter of ‘Old King Cole’. She transformed a conventional life by departing for the Holy Land in her old age to search for and find the True Cross on which Christ was crucified. The ‘Transfiguration’ element in Sandy’s convent name recalls the occasion when Jesus was transfigured, appeared in his full glory, to a few of the disciples: it recalls of course as well the title of Sandy’s treatise, and perhaps records a debt to the woman who first indicated to Sandy the possibility of transfiguring the commonplace.

Sandy is described as ‘in her middle age, when she was at last allowed all those visitors to the convent’: in fact she is approaching forty, the age at which Miss Brodie entered her prime. Sandy will not have a prime. The visitors are ‘a special dispensation … enforced on Sandy’: dispensations are usually granted, not enforced, and she does not seem very happy in her interviews, but very evidently ill at ease:

She clutched the bars of the grille as if she wanted to escape from the dim parlour beyond, for she was not composed like the other nuns who sat, when they received their rare visitors, well back in the darkness with folded hands. But Sandy always leaned forward and peered, clutching the bars with both hands.

That is our lasting image of the unquiet nun.

"Muriel Spark: *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie*," in Ten Modern Scottish Novels, Aberdeen University Press, 1984, pp. 100-22.

"*The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie* Spark, Muriel: Isobel Murray and Bob Tait (essay date 1984)." Contemporary Literary Criticism. Ed. Brigham Narins. Vol. 94. Thomson Gale, 1997. eNotes.com. 2006. 29 Oct, 2006 <http://lit.enotes.com/contemporary-literary-criticism/prime-miss-jean-brodie-spark-muriel/isobel-murray-bob-tait-essay-date-1984>

Jean Brodie, the Girls, the Gate

Several of Muriel Spark's novels place characters in insulated areas, contain them in tightly knit communities: the pilgrim centre in *The Comforters* (1957), the island in *Robinson* (1958), the geriatric ward in *Memento Mori* (1959), the hostel in *The Girls of Slender Means* (1963), the big house in *Not to Disturb* (1971), the apartment in *The Hothouse by the East River* (1973), the convent in *The Abbess of Crewe* (1974). Nowhere in Spark's output is the microcosmic world-within-a-world scenario more skilfully realized than in *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie* (1961), arguably her masterpiece. Rapidly written in eight weeks, the novel is set in and around an Edinburgh girls' school—Marcia Blaine, modelled on James Gillespie's, where Spark was educated—and has for its heroine a woman physically vibrant with vitality, assuredly in her prime.

Jean Brodie is one of the great character-creations of modern fiction, a contradictory soul who distrusts the Roman Catholic Church while spending summer holidays in Rome in search of culture; who admires the Church of Scotland but detests John Knox, its founder; who deplores the team spirit yet idolizes Mussolini's fascisti; who articulates a doctrine of romantic love yet sleeps with the dreary Mr Lowther and denies herself to one-armed Mr Lloyd because he is a married man with children. Though the central part of an accomplished fiction, Jean Brodie seems undeniably real, and Spark's friend Derek Stanford claims [in his *Inside the Forties: Literary Memoirs 1937–1957*, 1977] to have been 'introduced to the original of that audacious teacher by Muriel at the Poetry Society'. Spark herself has stated 'there was no "real" Miss Brodie' [letter to the critic dated 5 October 1982], and 'there was a Christina Kay who died during the '40s, greatly esteemed, but not like Miss Brodie in character' [letter to the critic dated 17 February 1983]. Jean Brodie may be a fact of fiction rather than life (the distinction between the two being blurred by Sparkian metaphysics) but then so are all Spark's characters: the difference between Jean Brodie and the others is that she appears to have an actual existence over and above the pages of a book that operates by implication. This is why she has been successfully transferred to stage, cinema and television. For thousands of readers, Jean Brodie actually exists in the same way that Sherlock Holmes and George Smiley actually exist. Though no saint, Jean Brodie is a literary legend.

The author's affection for Jean Brodie and her native city gives this novel of the 1930s a period charm that is rare in the caustic Spark canon. For *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie* Spark has reserved some of her most richly lyrical prose. The novel abounds in evocative phrases: 'the haunted November twilight of Edinburgh,' 'The evening paper rattle-snaked its way through the letter box and there was suddenly a six-o'clock feeling in the house,' 'Miss Brodie's voice soared up to the ceiling, and curled round the feet of the Senior girls upstairs,' 'The bare winter top branches of the trees brushed the windows of this long [science] room, and beyond that was the cold winter sky with a huge red sun,' 'The wind blew from the icy Forth and the sky was loaded with forthcoming snow,' 'Miss Brodie, indifferent to criticism as a crag,' 'Her name and memory, after her death, flitted from mouth to mouth like swallows in summer, and in winter they were gone'. Several of these poetic phrases make the novel, on one level, an elegy for an Edinburgh that has gone, though it lingers in the memory of Muriel Spark. Edinburgh, the home of Jean Brodie, is also identified by Spark as the city where John Knox clashed with Mary Queen of Scots; where Jean Brodie's ancestor Deacon Brodie (the original of Stevenson's dualistic Dr Jekyll) roamed as a burgher by day and a burglar by night; where spinsters such as Jean Brodie 'called themselves Europeans and Edinburgh a European capital, the city of Hume and Boswell.' Haunted by its historic past and pressurized by the 'progressive spinsters of Edinburgh,' the city acquires a magical dimension: 'dark heavy Edinburgh itself could suddenly be changed into a floating city when the light was a special pearly white and fell upon one of the gracefully fashioned streets.'

The contradictions in Jean Brodie's character are partly explained by the contrasts apparent in Edinburgh. On a long winter's walk in 1930, during which Sandy Stranger comes to the conclusion that 'the Brodie set was Miss Brodie's fascisti,' the girls are taken from the classically proportioned New Town to the 'reeking network of slums which the Old Town constituted in those years.' The Old Town is another world-within-a-world (or town-within-a-city), a no-girl's-land that has the alien atmosphere of a foreign country. Miss Brodie leads her privileged girls into the unpromising land of the Grassmarket:

A man sat on the icy-cold pavement; he just sat. A crowd of children, some without shoes, were playing some fight game, and some boys shouted after Miss Brodie's violet-clad company, with words that the girls had not heard before, but rightly understood to be obscene. Children and women with shawls came in and out of the dark closes…. A man and a woman stood in the midst of the crowd which had formed a ring round them. They were shouting at each other and the man hit the woman twice across the head.

In such a city, with its internal and eternal dichotomies, reality has several strata and a woman such as Jean Brodie can be in two minds at once. Like many Scots, Jean Brodie has a divided self.

Theologically, Jean Brodie's Edinburgh—where school-teachers bid their good mornings 'with predestination in their smiles'—is a place fashioned by John Knox from the philosophy of Calvin. Sandy Stranger, half-English, recognizes that the bleak doctrine of the elect is built into Edinburgh where elegance coexists with squalor. 'In fact,' Spark declares, 'it was the religion of Calvin of which Sandy felt deprived, or rather a specified recognition of it. She desired this birthright; something definite to reject.' Increasingly, Sandy Stranger makes a connection between Jean Brodie's scholastic élite and John Calvin's elect. The insight causes her to lose faith in her teacher:

she began to sense what went to the makings of Miss Brodie who had elected herself to grace in so particular a way and with more exotic suicidal enchantment that if she had simply taken to drink like other spinsters who couldn't stand it any more.

If *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie* is constructed around a microcosmic notion, it is not imaginatively limited by its location: behind the (albeit fictional) reality of Miss Brodie there are the historical figures of Knox, Calvin, Mussolini, Franco and Hitler. Spark's novel is enormously suggestive: the account of a group of schoolgirls and their teacher is also a statement on the nature of faith and fanaticism.

Jean Brodie's prime is officially launched in 1930, when the heroine is 39. A teacher in the Junior department of Marcia Blaine School, she chooses for her disciples (the biblical subtext is evident) six 10-year-old girls: Monica Douglas, who is famous for mathematics and subsequently marries a scientist; Rose Stanley, famous for sex, who marries a businessman; Eunice Gardiner, famous for gymnastics, who becomes a nurse married to a doctor; Mary Macgregor, famous for being 'a silent lump, a nobody,' who dies in a fire at the age of 23; Jenny Gray, famous for being pretty, who becomes an actress; and Sandy Stranger, 'notorious for her small, almost non-existent, eyes,' who becomes a nun famous for her psychological treatise, 'The Transfiguration of the Commonplace'. Sandy, the future Sister Helena of the Transfiguration, Jean Brodie's darling disciple, is the Judas who betrays her teacher to the head-mistress, Miss Mackay. As a result Miss Brodie is forced to retire in 1939, the year of a new world war, for teaching fascism—especially to Joyce Emily Hammond, who dies on her way to fight for Franco at Miss Brodie's bidding.

Technically, the novel is told in a series of flashbacks and flashforwards. It opens in 1936, breaks back to 1930 (the first year of Miss Brodie's prime) then uses timeshifts to indicate the rise of the Brodie set and the fall of Miss Brodie. Before the final tale of Miss Brodie's downfall has been told, the reader is given the date of the heroine's death: in 1946, at the age of 55, after 'suffering from an internal growth.' In *The Comforters* Spark queried the concept of authorial omniscience; in *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie* she makes full use of it, magisterially providing the reader with the information she explores in the novel. She also delivers herself of a personal opinion as if her heroine were an actual rather than a fictional woman:

> In some ways, her attitude [of hostility to Roman Catholicism] was a strange one, because she was by temperament suited only to the Roman Catholic Church; possibly it could have embraced, even while it disciplined, her soaring and diving spirit, it might even have normalized her.

The comment encourages the reader to believe in the reality of Jean Brodie, appropriately so since she is Spark's most forgivable character.

For all her admiration of her heroine, Spark makes fun of her fantasies. There is a reductive, comic quality to Jean Brodie's assumption of the leadership of an élite corps of schoolgirls. An admirer of Il Duce, Mussolini, she defines teaching as 'a leading out, from e, out and duco, I lead.' Regarding her pupils as the 'crème de la crème' she indoctrinates her élite—her elect—with her own prejudices. Her pupils are 'vastly informed on a lot of subjects irrelevant to the authorized curriculum,' being familiar with the accomplishments of Sybil Thorndike and Anna Pavlova and, above all, with the romantic tale of Jean's lover, Hugh Carruthers, who fell 'like an autumn leaf'—so she informs the girls in autumn under an elm—at Flanders, a tragedy enlarged with frequent retellings. Like her heroes—Mussolini, Franco, Hitler—Miss Brodie is a dogmatist. When she asks her class to name the greatest Italian painter and one pupil names Leonardo da Vinci, she says, revealingly, 'That is incorrect. The answer is Giotto, he is my favourite.' In place of observations, she inflicts on the girls her dogmatic assertions: 'Art is greater than science,' 'Mussolini is one of the greatest men in the world,' and (preposterously) ‘unemployment is even farther abolished under [Mussolini] than it was last year.’

Projecting herself as the peer of fascist dictators, Jean Brodie nevertheless remains the victim of her own urban and intellectual environment, ‘for in many ways Miss Brodie was an Edinburgh spinster of the deepest dye.’ Like other Spark heroines she is inclined to solipsism, unable to understand the wider world except as an extension of herself. If circumstances do not accommodate her expectations she attempts to satisfy her desires deviously. Teddy Lloyd, the art teacher, is a married man, which means that she can only allow herself to kiss him surreptitiously in the art room, a gesture she believes preserves her personal purity. Arrogantly, however, she decides to make love to Teddy vicariously by sacrificing one of her girls, choosing Rose Stanley to be her surrogate. Convinced that the girls only exist to do her will, she feels she can thus have the best of both worlds: the world of the Edinburgh spinster as well as the world of the romantic heroine. In the event, it is Sandy Stranger, not Rose Stanley, who sleeps with Teddy Lloyd. The art teacher accepts the substitute physically but remains besotted by Jean: all his portraits of the Brodie set reproduce her features on their faces. Miss Brodie’s physical affair with Mr Lowther, the music teacher, is also rationalized, for she sleeps with this bachelor ‘in a spirit of definite duty, if not exactly martyrdom.’ Tragically, Jean’s hypocrisy leads to the loss of everything that is precious to her: the friendship of Mr Lowther (who marries the science teacher), the devotion of Teddy Lloyd, the position she holds at Marcia Blaine, the adoration of her girls.

Surely no girls in adult fiction have ever been portrayed so unsentimentally as the Brodie set. Sandy Stranger and Jenny Gray are obsessed with sex from the age of 10. Thinking of Miss Brodie’s prime, they see her belonging to a different species from their parents. ‘They don’t have primes,’ says Sandy. ‘They have sexual intercourse,’ adds Jenny. Sandy, who has fantasies about the heroes of Kidnapped and Jane Eyre, is reduced to giggles when Mr Lloyd shows lantern slides of Italian paintings and points at the curves on Botticelli’s female figures. Sandy and Jenny giggle together over the lewd mechanics of sewing machines. Between them Sandy and Jenny concoct a romantic fiction around Jean Brodie’s supposed sexual adventures with Hugh of Flanders Field and Mr Lowther. This subplot allows Spark to parody romantic pulp-fiction with glorious comic results, culminating in a letter the girls imagine Miss Brodie writing to Gordon Lowther:

Your letter has moved me deeply as you may imagine [but] there is another in my life whose mutual love reaches out to me beyond the bounds of Time and Space. He is Teddy Lloyd! Intimacy has never taken place with him. He is married to another. One day in the art room we melted into each other’s arms and knew the truth. But I was proud of giving myself to you when you came and took me in the bracken on Arthur’s Seat while the storm raged about us…. I may permit misconduct to occur again from time to time as an outlet because I am in my Prime…. Allow me, in conclusion, to congratulate you warmly upon your sexual intercourse, as well as your singing.

When Jenny sees a man exposing himself beside the Water of Leith, Sandy is transported into a Walter Mitty world in which she befriends the policewoman (suitably romanticized) who had questioned Jenny. By the time they are 12 the two girls feel they have, imaginatively, done it all:

The world of pure sex seemed years away. Jenny had turned twelve. Her mother had recently given birth to a baby boy, and the event had not moved them even to speculate upon its origin.

‘There’s not much time for sex research in the Senior school,’ Sandy said.

‘I feel I’m past it,’ said Jenny.

Linguistically *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie* is a treat. Spark’s use of cross-references, for example, creates irony. Eunice Gardiner is reprimanded by Miss Brodie for using the adjective ‘social’ as a noun. The incident connects with a flashforward, early in the novel, when Eunice, a married woman, tells her husband she wishes to go and visit Miss Brodie’s grave:

‘Who was Miss Brodie?’

‘A teacher of mine, she was full of culture. She was an Edinburgh Festival all on her own. She used to give us teas at her flat and tell us about her prime.’

‘Prime what?’

Elsewhere Spark’s dialogue provides exquisite comic exchanges. Monica Douglas’s claim that she has seen Teddy Lloyd kissing Miss Brodie in the art room is queried by Sandy Stranger:

‘What part of the art room were they standing in?’ Sandy said.

‘The far side,’ Monica said. ‘I know he had his arm round her and was kissing her. They jumped apart when I opened the door.’

‘Which arm?’ Sandy snapped.

‘The right of course, he hasn’t got a left.’

The interrogation continues:

‘Was it a long and lingering kiss?’ Sandy demanded, while Jenny came close to hear the answer.

Monica cast the corner of her eye up to the ceiling as if doing mental arithmetic. Then when her calculation was finished she said, ‘Yes it was.’

‘How do you know if you didn’t stop to see how long it was?’

‘I know,’ said Monica, getting angry, ‘by the bit that I did see. It was a small bit of a good long kiss that I saw, I could tell it by his arm being round her.’

Using a descriptive device, Spark attaches to the principal characters a set of words that stick to them throughout the novel. Jean Brodie is forever proclaiming her prime, Sandy Stranger is constantly condemned by her eyes—her ‘small, almost non-existent eyes,' 'her little eyes screwed on Miss Brodie,' 'a hypocritical blinking of her eyes,' 'her little pig-like eyes,' her 'abnormally small eyes.' Teddy Lloyd first kisses Sandy because of her eyes, telling her 'That'll teach you to look at an artist like that.' Mary Macgregor's presence in the novel is verbally linked to death by fire. The manner of her death is described at the beginning of the second chapter of the novel:

> [After the outbreak of the Second World War, Mary] died while on leave in Cumberland in a fire in the hotel. Back and forth along the corridors ran Mary Macgregor, through the thickening smoke. She ran one way; then, turning, the other way; and at either end the blast furnace of the fire met her.

Shortly after this flashforward there is an allusion to Mary 'who later, in that hotel fire, ran hither and thither till she died.' Armed with this foreknowledge, the reader is then alerted to the significance of Mary's panic as a schoolgirl during an experiment in the science room when magnesium flares shoot out of test-tubes:

> Mary Macgregor took fright and ran along a single lane between two benches, met with a white flame, and ran back to meet another brilliant tongue of fire. Hither and thither she ran in panic between the benches until she was caught and induced to calm down.

The prose here has the poetic force of a refrain and in such ways Spark conditions the reader's responses to various situations in the novel.

Thematically, *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie* is a persuasive study of the élitist mentality that powers the body of the heroine. 'Give me a girl at an impressionable age, and she is mine for life,' says Miss Brodie, but Sandy Stranger, the most reflective of the disciples, realizes that her leader is flawed by fanaticism. Ironically, Sandy's own fantasies are flattened by the sexual facts of life and she retreats from Miss Brodie, who is suddenly seen as ridiculous rather than sublime. After ruining Miss Brodie's teaching career, Sandy retreats further from everyday reality, not into a school but into the Catholic Church, 'in whose ranks she had found quite a number of Facists much less agreeable than Miss Brodie.' It is Sandy Stranger, alias Sister Helena of the Transfiguration, who delivers the last words in the book, from the isolation of her nunnery. Asked about the main influences in her life Sandy says 'there was a Miss Jean Brodie in her prime.' The commonplace has been transfigured: Sandy's life, like the reader's, has been enriched by the charismatic personality of Jean Brodie, who, for all her faults, has a poetic panache.

"Jean Brodie, the Girls, the Gate," in Muriel Spark, Methuen, 1986, pp. 63-86.

"*The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie* Spark, Muriel: Alan Bold (essay date 1986)." Contemporary Literary Criticism. Ed. Brigham Narins. Vol. 94. Thomson Gale, 1997. eNotes.com. 2006. 29 Oct, 2006 <http://lit.enotes.com/contemporary-literary-criticism/prime-miss-jean-brodie-spark-muriel/alan-bold-essay-date-1986>

The Narrative Structure of Muriel Spark's *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie*

Because the narrative line of Muriel Spark's *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie* is often interrupted and time seems to be just a plaything of the author, a first reading may leave one feeling dislocated. Further investigation, however, proves that Spark regularly introduces flashforwards and fantasies into the novel's present time in order to demonstrate the unforeseen ways in which the teacher, Jean Brodie, influences her students, especially Sandy Stranger.

The novel depicts "the Brodie set," a group of six middle-class schoolgirls who are variously influenced by one teacher—Jean Brodie. It follows these girls from the time they are ten years old until a few years after they leave school. The story is centred on one student, Sandy Stranger, whose actions finally lead to the firing of Miss Brodie, and who later becomes a nun. The novel's chronology runs from 1930 into the 1950s. This time line is punctuated by two kinds of out-of-time-sequence events: the flashforward, in which future events are actually depicted; and the fantasy, in which a character imagines or describes events that do not take place in her "real" world. While there are a few brief flashbacks, and some occasional references to past events, it is primarily the use of flashforwards and fantasies that distort the forward motion of time or disrupt the reader's sense of the novel's "reality."

Since the novel's publication in 1961, critics have found many ways to explain Spark's particular way of sequencing the events of this novel. David Lodge concludes [in "*The Uses and Abuses of Omniscience: Method and Meaning in Muriel Spark's* The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie," in *The Novelist at the Crossroads*, 1971] that

> … the jumps forwards and backwards in time, the pointed interventions of the authorial voice—constantly check any inclination we may have to 'lose ourselves' in the story or to sink into emotional identification with any of the characters; it detaches us from the experience presented and makes us think about its meaning, or meanings.

In addition, Lodge finds that the flashforwards are useful because they "present the extension of Miss Brodie's influence on the girls in their adult life simultaneously with their relationship as teacher and pupils." The movement between present and future creates a view of reality termed "Godlike" by Anthony Burgess [in *The Novel Now*, 1967], and "disorderly order" by Alan Kennedy [in "*Cannibals, Okapis and Self-Slaughter in the Fiction of Muriel Spark*," in *The Protean Self*, 1974]. Adding the time shifts, fantasies, and authorial interventions to the depiction of events in the "real world" does create "a series of dislocations, each of which disturbs one's former conception of the novel and transforms it into something new" [Bernard Harrison, "*Muriel Spark and Jane Austen*," in *The Modern English Novel*, edited by Gabriel Josipovici, 1976].

While these and other critical explanations all add to our understanding of the novel, I do not think enough detailed attention has yet been given to Spark's technique, a technique which economically allows her to show how an individual is formed by a unique combination of internal and external forces. Neither the individual nor those around her will necessarily understand all these forces or their relative value (which are most significant, which least, etc.); the creation of an individual is marvellously complex. As we watch the evolution of Sandy Stranger, we are privy to the influences of people, places, and information, to the plans of Sandy's teacher, and privy also to Sandy's fantasies and future. Spark forces us to see that no individual could have predicted the adult Sandy would become; no one around her could have seen how the pieces of her individual puzzle would fit together. Ann Dobie concludes [in "Muriel Spark's Definition of Reality," Critique (1970)] that in *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie* "experiences of human beings are seen often to be precarious, inconclusive, and transitory though they are considered by the characters to be of great moment." At the same time, events which are not presumed to be of great importance may turn out to have great significance.

Let us turn now to these events. I will look first at time present, and then move on to the flashforwards, followed by the fantasies. I believe it is necessary to pause here, however, and define flashforward.

A flashforward is more than a reference to the future (these are common in novels of all periods) because it includes description, action and/or dialogue, not just summary of what will occur: it is an actual scene in future time. In many parts of this novel there are also brief references to the future. Rose Stanley's future reputation for sex, Monica Douglas's later fame "for mathematics and anger," and mention that the six girls will all feel differently about their studies in the Senior School a few months later, are three such references. However, these do not contain descriptions of place, narration of action, or dialogue. What I am calling flashforwards contain one or more of such dramatizing elements.

Time present in this novel runs from 1930 into the 1950s. It begins with the six girls of the "Brodie set" at age ten, takes them through Junior and then Senior school, and then moves on to the betrayal, retirement, and death of Miss Brodie. It includes Sandy's entry into a convent and conversations about Miss Brodie among Sandy, Eunice, Rose, Monica, and Jenny, and then ends with a conversation between Sandy and a young man who has come to the convent to interview her.

Although time present in the novel begins with 1930, the novel opens in 1936, when the six girls who make up the "Brodie set" are all sixteen. In eight pages we become acquainted with the girls' current qualities and with Miss Brodie's endangered status as a teacher at the Marcia Blaine School. There are two brief references to the past: one indicating that when the girls moved from the Junior to the Senior school they were already a distinctive group, and the other noting that these girls have had a "secret life" for six years. At the end of this introductory scene, Stark reminds us of the date and, simultaneously, lets us see that Miss Brodie, a teacher in the prime of her powers who espouses an eccentric set of non-traditional educational objectives, mourns the loss of certain traditional values: "These years are still the years of my prime…. Here is my tram car. I daresay I'll not get a seat. This is nineteen-thirty-six. The age of chivalry is past." This scene has sometimes mistakenly been seen as taking place in present time, with the rest of the novel an "extended flashback from the point … when the girls are aged sixteen" [Lodge].

When the next paragraph opens with "Six years previously …" we, as readers, might think that we have moved to a flashback. Only later do we realize that the first eight pages were a flashforward and that the time present of the novel begins on page 16, in 1930. Throughout the novel, Spark is very careful to keep the reader oriented in time. There are constant references to the season, school term, actual year, or to the age of the girls. All of these pinpoint where the reader is and root the novel in a particular historic time period. They also allow us to return, in an orderly fashion, from the fantasies and flashforwards that are such striking features of the novel.

Altogether, eleven flashforwards interrupt the present time of the novel. The first, as mentioned above, shows the six girls of the "Brodie set" in 1936; the second depicts the death of Mary, the set's scapegoat; the third shows Eunice, in the year 1959, having a conversation with her husband about the possibility of putting flowers on Miss Brodie's grave; and the seventh, in 1946, describes Monica talking to Miss Brodie, now in a nursing home. Miss Brodie wonders if it might be Sandy who "betrayed" her to the school's headmistress so that she lost her teaching position. The ninth flashforward focuses on Jenny, now a married forty-year-old, who is overwhelmed by a sexual fantasy as powerful as her youthful sexual imaginings. The remaining six flashforwards all emanate from Sandy and show her talking with or about Miss Brodie. Sandy's flashforwards most strongly highlight the influence that Miss Brodie actually had, as opposed to the one described in present time—the one she intended to have.

Flashforward four shows Sandy, now a nun—Sister Helena of the Transfiguration, in conversation with a young man from Edinburgh. They contrast their memories of the city, and the man describes the forces that influenced him in his teens: "Auden and Eliot[;]… the Spanish Civil War." He then asks Sandy about the greatest influence upon her: "Was it political, personal? Was it Calvinism?" "Oh no," said Sandy. "But there was a Miss Jean Brodie in her prime." And since Sandy has said that influences in teen-age years are often important "even if they provide something to react against," we suspect that such was Miss Brodie's role for her. Jean Brodie wished to have a positive influence on her students, but for Sandy, the teacher's most important function may have been a negative one.

Flashforward five begins with Monica, in the late 1950s affirming to Sandy that she really did see Miss Brodie kissing the art teacher, Teddy Lloyd, back when she and Sandy were in the Junior school together. It then moves to a conversation between Miss Brodie and Sandy, in 1946—Miss Brodie's last year of life and Sandy's last year outside the convent. Miss Brodie confirms the love she and Mr. Lloyd shared and states that they never did become lovers. She admits she is now past her prime, and she tries to make Sandy her confidante. Sandy is fairly unresponsive, but she does give Miss Brodie one bit of emotional support by telling her ex-teacher that her "prime" was a "good prime." This scene reveals a cool Sandy, withholding herself from her teacher, who finally has to ask "are you listening, Sandy?" The flashforward here confirms that Sandy, once so wrapped up in her teacher's every idea and activity, no longer desires intimacy with Brodie.

Flashforward six continues the conversation between Sandy and Jean Brodie in 1946. It is here that we discover that it was Sandy who betrayed Miss Brodie and discover too that the teacher who once fascinated her is now "tiresome."

Flashforward eight begins with Rose and Sandy as adults, talking about Mary. Sandy wishes she had been nicer to the unfortunate Mary, given the sad end to which she came. And Rose asks "How were we to know?" making the question of influences, foresight, and the unstable nature of reality stand out boldly. The flashforward then jumps back to the time and setting of flashforwards five and six, with Miss Brodie wondering if it were Mary who acted against her. Spark's flashforward technique makes it clear that Miss Brodie is blind to the actual way she affected her students. She cannot tell which of the girls were "loyal" to her and which particular one betrayed her.

In flashforward ten we observe Sandy telling Rose that Miss Brodie lost her job because of her political views, not because of her sexual activities. The scene shift and we observe Sandy and Monica discussing Miss Brodie's love for the art teacher, Teddy Lloyd. The two women agree that Miss Brodie's "renunciation" of Lloyd had some meaning, since she "was a woman in her prime." These scenes, taken together, confirm that Sister Helena has transformed her earlier relationship to and ideas about Miss Brodie in ways her teacher could never imagine.

The last flashforward is very brief; it merely inserts a note to show the frivolity of Miss Brodie's politics, for she admits to Sandy, after the war, that Hitler was "rather naughty." Sandy has no line or look, but she is the silent recipient of this odd assessment of Hitler, and we know it is stored in her mind.

All eleven flashforwards are interwoven into the time line of 1930 through 1938, the years the Brodie set is in school. The fantasies, however, occur only during the time the girls are in the junior division—1930–1932.

In the fantasies, as in the flashforwards, proprietorship belongs mostly to Sandy. Of the eleven fantasies, two are shared between Sandy and Jenny, who together are writing "The Mountain Eyrie," the love story of Jean Brodie and Hugh Carruthers (Miss Brodie's first love, who died in World War One). Of the remaining nine fantasies, one is Sandy's solo writing of this love story, while the other eight are Sandy's vivid imaginings of conversations with romanticized characters.

In five of her conversational fantasies, Sandy speaks with figures from books that are favorites of Miss Brodie: the Lady of Shalott; Alan Breck, the hero of Kidnapped; and Rochester, from Jane Eyre. In another fantasy, Sandy is a dancer with the skill and status of Pavlova. The two discuss the difficulties of the misunderstood artist. Spark uses these fantasies to demonstrate the effect of Miss Brodie's romanticism on young Sandy.

In two fantasies Sandy is a colleague of Sergeant Anne Grey, the female inspector who questioned Jenny after Jenny was surprised by a man exposing himself. In these two fantasies Sandy and Anne Grey discuss the "intimacy" that has been occurring between Jean Brodie and the music teacher, Gordon Lowther; Sandy's youthful sexuality is expressed here more explicitly than in her earlier fantasies, for as she and Anne Grey gaze at each other "their mutual understanding [is] too deep for words," and Sandy finds her imagined colleague "thrilling." Spark seems to point here to the natural sexuality of the young Sandy, which forms part of her real life attachment to her teacher. Perhaps because of the teacher's actual sexual activity with Gordon Lowther, Sandy seeks a fantasy outlet to redirect her girlish feelings. The confused sexuality that will surround Sandy's ongoing relationship to her teacher is forecast in this fantasy.

The remaining fantasy is a fleeting argument with an imagined husband. The conflict fantasized seems to echo the conflict which Sandy (in time present) is experiencing concerning how to treat her classmate Mary. It is an odd insight into a life Sandy never consciously considers—the life of the mundane, married woman. One knows that Sandy will become a nun, marrying an institution rather than a person. This fantasy therefore seems to encapsulate unresolved sexual tensions of the young girl—tensions that will be exacerbated by her affair with Teddy Lloyd, Miss Brodie's rejected lover, and which may form part of her motive for religious conversion.

In Prime, Spark's juxtaposition of fantasies and flashforwards with time present adds to our knowledge of Miss Brodie's effect on Sandy, and, to a lesser extent, her effect on the other girls. In her fantasies, we see the young Sandy attempting to play the role of a romantic heroine—trying to become the equal of models Miss Brodie has placed before her. As a young girl, Sandy longs to live up to her admired teacher's ideals. We also see, via flashforwards (which are not fantasies, but realities) the actual consequences of Sandy's interaction with Miss Brodie. Meanwhile, in the present time of the novel, we watch the egocentric and idiosyncratic Miss Brodie attempt to shape Sandy and the other girls in the set. She tries to give them what she thinks is a valuable education, one that will allow them to become extraordinary—dedicated to work or love. She attempts to attract their love and loyalty, assuming that if given a student "at an impressionable age" she will make that girl hers "for life."

The education and influence offered by Miss Brodie do not last for life, except in negative or distorted ways. In her discussion of Prime [in "*A World at War: One Big Miss Brodie*," in *Communities of Women*, 1978], Nina Auerbach focuses on the power of Miss Brodie to serve as a "primary" source of development upon all the girls but Rose. However, none of the girls become famous and dedicated artists, fulfilling the hopes of their old teacher. Jenny becomes a minor actress, Eunice a nurse, Mary a shorthand typist, and Monica an undistinguished science worker. Rose, who marries well, casts off "Miss Brodie's influence as a dog shakes pond-water from its coat." Joyce Emily, a temporary member of the group, dies in Spain, on her way to fight on the Loyalist side, having been influenced by Miss Brodie to attempt a heroic destiny. In Joyce Emily's case, Miss Brodie's influence was completely detrimental, although Miss Brodie herself insists on seeing the girl as a heroine. The remaining student, Sandy, converts to Catholicism and becomes Sister Helena. She is dedicated to her religious life, but Miss Brodie tells Monica, "that is not the sort of dedication I meant."

In a way, one could view this novel as a comedy of errors. Miss Brodie acts erroneously, although she thinks she is acting in the best interests of her pupils to lift them above the run of ordinary life. Sandy also acts erroneously for, although she becomes a nun, she is lacking in the peace and serenity that a religious conversion ought to allow. She "clutches the bars of the grille" when she talks with visitors; her dedication to a religious life seems to be based more on need than on transcendent peace or joy. In fact, no mention is made of any religious rewards

Sandy has received from her life as a nun. The lives of both women have gone comically awry. As Judy Little points out [in Comedy and the Woman Writer: Woolf, Spark, and Feminism, 1983], this is the kind of comedy which questions the way the world is ordered and which presents "a relentless mocking of truths otherwise taken to be self-evident or even sacred." The method Spark employs to achieve this comic effect largely depends on shifts into future time and into the imaginative world of Sandy Stranger’s mind.

In *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie*, Muriel Spark sets up a careful counterpoint of flashforwards and fantasies which work against the actual 1930s setting of the novel most effectively. This historical period, in which European fascism developed, is a perfect backdrop against which to display Jean Brodie’s eccentric authoritarianism. Brodie’s hopes to influence her star pupils to fulfil her own romantic dreams of heroism, artistic fulfilment, dedication to discipline, and elitism are detailed in the time present narration of the story. However, as Spark demonstrates, through the use of out-of-time-sequence events, Brodie’s actual influence does not match her conscious intentions. Spark uses eleven flashforwards to present future events, showing the true consequences of Miss Brodie’s actions and, particularly, the effects of these actions upon Sandy. Spark interjects eleven fantasies which exhibit otherwise hidden aspects of Sandy’s youthful mind, aspects which will later be sublimated into Sandy’s betrayal of Miss Brodie and her uneasy conversion to the life of a nun. Together, the fantasies and flashforwards dramatize the unexpected ways in which a seemingly dedicated teacher can affect her pupils.

"The Narrative Structure of Muriel Spark’s *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie*," in The Midwest Quarterly, Vol. 31, No. 4, Summer, 1990, pp. 488-98.

"*The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie* Spark, Muriel: Anne L. Bower (essay date Summer 1990)." Contemporary Literary Criticism. Ed. Brigham Narins. Vol. 94. Thomson Gale, 1997. eNotes.com. 2006. 29 Oct, 2006 <http://lit.enotes.com/contemporary-literary-criticism/prime-miss-jean-brodie-spark-muriel/anne-l-bower-essay-date-summer-1990>