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Course Material

Department of English and Modern European Languages

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B.A. (Hons.) English Semester-VI

Paper I: Twentieth Century British Fiction (Code: Eng- 601)

Unit-I Joseph Conrad : *Lord Jim*

E.M. Forster : *A Passage to India*

Unit-III Virginia Woolf : *Mrs. Dalloway*

Muriel Spark : *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie*

Dear Students, Hello.

As I've already taught you Conrad, I'll provide you course material for the topics highlighted above.

You can find below the material on *Muriel Spark : The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie*.

Prepare your answers on the theme of the novel, the personality and role of Miss Brodie, and its technique.

With this I have completed your course.

In case you have any doubts you can contact me on phone or send queries to my email.

All the best!

Muriel Spark : The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie

Bionote

Muriel Spark was born in Edinburgh in 1918. A poet and novelist, she wrote short stories, radio plays, children's books, reviews and essays, as well as critical biographies of nineteenth century literary figures including Emily Brontë and Mary Shelley. Her play *Doctors of Philosophy* was performed in London in 1962 and was published in 1963.

In 1963 she described in fictional form what it was to be half Gentile and half Jewish in her story *The Gentile Jewesses*, which was much enjoyed by her mother and son at the time. She later examined her feelings more profoundly in her novel *The Mandelbaum Gate*, which won the James Tait Black Memorial Prize, and the Yorkshire Post, Book of the Year 1966. Her early career was one of grinding poverty and hard work, writing poems and essays for literary magazines in London.

She was appointed General Secretary of the Poetry Society and Editor of the Poetry Review. There she endured violent opposition from the old guard but made many friends of the poets, whom she insisted on paying for their work. Eventually she was forced to leave, choosing to be fired and therefore paid as opposed to resigning without payment. In all this time she had a small son to support with the help of her parents in Scotland.

Muriel Spark is best known for her many concise and witty novels. *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie*, *Memento Mori*, *The Girls of Slender Means*, *Symposium*, *Loitering with Intent* and *A Far Cry from Kensington* are some among many other successful titles.

She published several volumes of poetry and short stories; and was awarded prizes from early youth until her death in 2006. These included the prestigious Ingersoll Foundation T.S. Eliot Prize (1992), The Italia Prize for the dramatic radio musical of *The Ballad of Peckham Rye* (1962) and *Nomination* (2005) for the Best International Man Booker Prize. In the early 1960s Muriel Spark adapted some of her work for the B.B.C Radio and wrote four original radio plays: “*The Interview*“, “*The Party Through the Wall*“, “*The Danger Zone*” and “*The Dry River Bed*”. These were published by Macmillan, London (U.K.) in 1961 under the title “*Voices at Play*” and J.B. Lippincott Company (U.S.A.) in 1962.

Publication

The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie was published in 1961.

Overview

The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie (1961) is a disturbing portrait of an Edinburgh schoolmistress and her group of favoured pupils, her 'crème de la crème';

Set in Edinburgh during the 1930s, it describes the career of eccentric and egotistical Miss Brodie, teacher at the Marcia Blaine School for Girls, and her domination of her 'set' of 16-year-olds, Monica Douglas ('famous mostly for mathematics'), Rose Stanley, Eunice Gardiner ('spritely gymnastics and glamorous swimming'), Jenny Gray (an intended actress), Mary Macgregor (famed as 'silent lump' and scapegoat), and Sandy Stewart, who becomes Miss Brodie's betrayer.

With many flashes back and forward, it describes the manner in which Miss Brodie fascinates her disciples, who are particularly intrigued by her relationships with two male teachers, the married and Catholic art master, Mr Lloyd, and the bachelor Church of Scotland singing master, Mr Lowther, who, rejected after much dalliance by Miss Brodie, in despair marries the science teacher.

Sandy (rather than Rose, as Miss Brodie plans) has an affair with Mr Lloyd while Miss Brodie is away in the summer of 1938 touring Hitler's Germany; the results of this are that Sandy becomes a Catholic and arranges the dismissal of Miss Brodie on the grounds of her sympathy with Fascism, manifested not only in her enthusiasm for Hitler but also in her indirect responsibility for the death of another schoolgirl, not one of 'the set', who had died on a journey to Spain in the Spanish Civil War, encouraged by Miss Brodie to support Franco.

Miss Brodie herself, dangerous but compelling, 'an Edinburgh Festival all on her own', is the centre of the novel's considerable moral ambiguity and complexity; she is seen most clearly through the 'treacherous' little eyes of Sandy, who, we are told in the second chapter, in a characteristic omniscient narrative leap, becomes a nun and writes a 'psychological treatise on the nature of moral perception, called "The Transfiguration of the Commonplace"'.

Background, Notes, Analysis

- Muriel Spark's *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie* depicts the coming of age of six adolescent girls in Edinburgh, Scotland during the 1930's. The story brings us into the classroom of Miss Jean Brodie, a fascist school teacher at the Marcia Blaine School for Girls, and gives close encounter with the social and political climate in Europe during the era surrounding the second World War.

- Spark's novel is a narrative relating to us the complexities of politics and of social conformity, as well as of non-conformity. Through looking at the Brodie set and the reciprocities between these students and their teacher, the writer, in this novel, reviews the essence of group dynamics and brings in to focus the adverse effects that the power of authority over the masses can produce.

- Sparks, in so doing projects her skepticism toward the teacher's ideologies. This skepticism is played out through the persona of Sandy Stranger, who becomes the central character in a class of Marcia Blaine school girls.

- Sandy's character is even more focally sculpted than the teacher's favored disciples who came to be known as the Brodie Set; a small group of girls favored by Miss Jean Brodie in her *Prime*.

- The Brodie Set is a social

system and a enigmatic network of social relations that acts to draw the behavior of its members toward the core values of the clique. The teacher Miss Jean Brodie projects upon this impressionable "set," her strong fascist opinions. She controls this group on the basis that she is in her prime. Her prime being the point in life when she is at the height of wisdom and insight.

- Sandy pejoratively uses the personality traits and ideology of Brodie to overthrow her, by unveiling them.

- Sparks is clearly opposed to the kind of authoritarian power and control that is exercised over the impressionable adolescents by a conniving school teacher.

- The writer thus uses the pitfalls of social conformity found in classical studies, in order to make specific points. For example, research done by social psychologists Muzafer, Carolyn Sherif and Solomon Asch treated social conformity as an aspect of group dynamics. This is present in Spark's novel, as seen by the dynamics of the group formed by a teacher named Miss Brodie.

- Brodie's students, like the subjects of the said psychological studies, conform to a set of beliefs under the pressure and power of suggestion despite what could be better judgement. This is shown in the passage when Sandy expresses the desire to be nice to Mary, but decides not to because she knew that such an action would not be in accordance with the Brodie Set's system of behavior (Spark, 46).

- The narrator says about Sandy:
She was even more frightened then, by her temptation to be nice to Mary Macgregor, since by this action she would separate herself, and be lonely, and blameable in a more dreadful way than Mary who, although officially the faulty one, was at least inside Miss Brodie's category of heroines in the making.

-Theorists would say that an individual tends to conform to a unanimous group judgment even when that judgment is obviously in error.

-The more eager an individual is to become a member of a group, the more that person tends to orient his or her behavior to the norms of the group. This eagerness is true of Sandy Stranger.

-Miss Brodie often makes reference to Sandy overdoing things, or

trying to hard. If the Brodie Set must hold their heads high, Sandy held her head the highest (Spark, 35).

- Miss Brodie warned that "One day, Sandy, you will go too far." Also, the more ambiguous the situation, the greater the group's influence on the individual.

- When the group's judgment reflects personal or aesthetic preference, however, the individual feels little pressure to conform as is the case with Spark's character, Sandy Stranger.

- Brodie's fascism, born of an authoritarian political movement that developed in Italy and other European countries after 1919 as a reaction against the political and social changes brought about by World War I, is projected in this novel as the unsettling proliferation of socialism and communism in Europe during the 1930's and 1940's.

- The early Fascist program was a mixture of left and right wing ideas that emphasized intense nationalism, productivism, antisocialism, elitism, and the need for a strong authoritarian leadership. This was the Brodie ideology.

- With the postwar economic crisis, a widespread lack of confidence in the traditional political system, and a growing fear of socialism, Fascist ideology began to take root in Europe.

- The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie takes us into a time when the spirit of the times reflected Voluntaristic philosophers such as Arthur Schopenhauer, Friedrich Nietzsche, and Henri Bergson and to Social Darwinism with its emphasis on the survival of the fittest. These personalities, like that of the fictitious Miss Jean Brodie, saw fascism as an effective, internationally appealing mass movement.

- Brodie, herself, is depicted as the personification of this fascist movement in the Marcia Blaine School for Girls. A movement against which society, as personified by Sandy, must resist.

- It becomes Sandy's mission to examine and expose the dynamics of how the power of suggestion enforced by an authority figure such as the teacher Miss Brodie, would adversely affect the socio-cultural dynamics of school life, freedom of choice and the social liberty of each girl in the Brodie Set.

- In the struggle for social liberty and freedom from

adverse indoctrination, Sandy betrays the anti- Catholic Miss Brodie and defiantly converts to Catholicism by becoming a nun.

- Nonconformity, is thus played out as a result of Sandy's rejection of the Brodie group norms. Sandy did not observe those norms. Sandy's defiance of the group's norms becomes so great that the society of Brodie, itself, dissolves under her attack. Sandy's antagonism, in fact, becomes the conformity to the norms of a particular subculture that the Brodie group took a stance against, Catholicism.

- Social scientists often examine conformity in the context of deviance. Sandy is a deviant as far as the Brodie set is concerned. It is the Brodie clique, however that shows behavior that varies in some way from the normative rules of a social system; the school.

- This social group tries to regulate behavior, by establishing boundaries and excluding others. These boundaries are maintained by the interaction between Sandy's behavior which deviates from the norm, and the agent Miss Jean Brodie that works to control behavior, as well as the social mores of the Brodie set. Miss Brodie, however, is still able to force a change of attitude and belief in the young students, which ultimately leads to the demise of one girl.

Group interactions that mark the outside limits over which the norm has control generates solidarity. The group norm remains valid only if it is used regularly as a basis of judgment. is true of the Brodie Set.

- The girls of the Brodie Set make very few decisions without first making sure that such a decision would be in accordance with Brodie normative social rules. When facing the decision of which course of study they would take in the Senior School, the Brodie girls desired Classical learning. The school's Headmistress, Miss Mackay, notes about their decision for Classical learning that they chose that route of education "because Miss Brodie prefers it...What good will Latin and Greek be to you when you get married or take a job?" Miss Mackay was correct in her observation because Miss Brodie's preference for Classical learning was the sole reason that Mary Macgregor so eagerly desired to be allowed to take Classical classes.

- The social dynamics of power and knowledge and the epistemological issues of the sociology of knowledge becomes the centrally explored issues when the motivation, extreme social ideology and stance of Brodie and her girls, is examined. The Brodie set conforms and their behavior is in accord with the expectations of their social group. They express acquiescence to the norms of that group. Sandy rejects homogeneity.

Spark, in effect, gives, through her antagonist Sandy, her own ideology as to what knowledge is worth having, and how that knowledge should be acquired and disseminated.

- Furthermore, we are given insight as to dynamics of how knowledge is verified and acted upon. The novelist approach is less theoretical and more personal. We do not like Miss Brodie for her way of distributing knowledge and exercising power. This is not accidental, but arises from, what seems to be Spark's own theological erudition and personal experiences.

-Spark, herself, like the character Sandy in her novel, rebels by conversion. Spark converted from Anglican to Roman Catholic during the 1950's, and clearly projects a stance against fascism and its ideals, in life and in her novel (Lodge, 122). There is thus, the divergence of the basic assumptions of the dynamics of social power and knowledge as reflected in the author's life as well as is projected in her novel .

This approach then takes into account concepts that are not merely theoretical but also personal.

- When we analyze the critical episodes in Brodie's's dealings with her student we find a troubling endurance of a collective judgement of ideas, that marks the group. Brodie is eccentric in her teaching method and styles as she manipulates the minds and lives of all within the group. Spark thus unveils with careful timing, an epistemological leverage with which Sandy betrays and overthrows the Brodie Set.

- That Sandy leaves and becomes a nun is ironic since her strategy for preserving individuality may still be lost. The interest of any group is the natural enemy of its members individuality. Sandy must not be concerned only with the loss of individuality, as regards to the Brodie Set, but also with the danger of fascist ideology.

- Each individual's compliance with a group judgment, is perhaps counter to his or her own judgment, but at this small group level, conformity dispels individual judgement. Sandy projects to us that this kind of social conformity under the pressure of authority, is to be blamed for many social problems and adversities in the individual lives of the Brodie girls, and in society at large.

At issue in this short novel are two competing notions of education: the nonconformist individuality of Miss Jean Brodie's set and the team spirit and school loyalty insisted upon by Miss Mackay, the headmistress of the Marcia Blaine School for Girls. The story is told in

multiple time frames so that the girls of the Brodie set can reflect back from a mature perspective upon the events of their school days.

Brodie believes that she has entered her “prime” in 1930, and this perception influences her teaching, which becomes all the more idiosyncratic and personal. She ignores the standard curriculum and teaches her students about art, culture, and politics in line with her own proclivities. After the Brodie set graduates into the senior school, she has two of her favorites, Jenny Gray and Sandy Stranger, teach her Greek “at the same time as they learned it.” She has a passion for culture and knowledge.

In later life, after her forced retirement, Brodie admits to Sandy that she fell in love with Teddy Lloyd, the art master, but did not become his mistress because he was a married man. Instead, she had an affair with the music master, Gordon Lowther, a bachelor, in 1931. Miss Mackay and the moral Miss Gaunt, another schoolmistress, have their suspicions about this affair and encourage the sewing mistresses, Miss Ellen and Miss Alison Kerr, to serve as Lowther’s housekeepers, so as to spy on him. Eventually, Miss Ellen finds Brodie’s nightgown under a pillow at Lowther’s house, and Miss Gaunt sees that Miss Mackay is promptly told, though Miss Ellen cannot prove that the nightgown belonged to Brodie. As a consequence of this evidence, however, Lowther loses his position as choirmaster at the church of Mr. Gaunt, Miss Gaunt’s brother.

During the 1933 school term, Sandy discovers that others of the Brodie set—Rose Stanley, Monica Douglas, and Eunice Gardiner—have been sitting as models for Teddy Lloyd and that all of them were drawn to resemble Brodie. Brodie will not enter into a clandestine affair with the married Lloyd, but two years later, she decides that Rose Stanley should become Lloyd’s lover.

In 1935, Brodie begins to confide in Sandy, who tells her that Lowther has been seen playing golf with Miss Lockhart, the science teacher. Since Brodie has refused to marry him, Lowther proposes marriage to Miss Lockhart, and they are married between terms. With Lowther married, Brodie broods all the more over her romantic obsession with Lloyd.

In 1937, when the girls of the Brodie set are seventeen years old, Joyce Emily Hammond, who always wanted to join the Brodie set but was never quite accepted, leaves school and runs away to the Spanish Civil War. She is killed when the train on which she is riding is attacked. During the summer of 1938, Brodie visits Germany and Austria and is much impressed by Adolf Hitler’s leadership. While she is gone, Sandy has a five-week love affair with Teddy Lloyd. Discussing the affair later with her teacher and confidante, Sandy learns that Miss Brodie encouraged Joyce Emily to go to Spain to fight for Franco. In war as in love, Brodie permits her girls to live out her fantasies.

Outraged by this news, Sandy goes to Miss Mackay and gives her the justification for Brodie’s removal, not for her sexual behavior (any misconduct cannot be proved) but for her politics, explaining, “she’s a born Fascist.” Consequently, Brodie is forced to retire during the summer of 1939 on the grounds that she had been teaching Fascism. At the same time, Sandy converts to Roman Catholicism; later, she enters a convent to become Sister Helena of the Transfiguration.

Discouraged by her betrayal (but uncertain about which of the girls betrayed her), Brodie is now clearly past her prime. Much later in life she begins to gain the insight that she should have had earlier. Toward the end of the novel, Monica Douglas tells Sandy that before she died, Brodie suspected that Sandy had betrayed her.

The action centres on the romantic, fascinating, comic and ultimately tragic schoolmistress Jean Brodie who will, in the most archetypal sense, suffer for the sin of hubris, her excessive self-confidence. At first, her ideas about beauty and goodness, her mysterious glamour and charm will dazzle and seduce her girls – “the crème de la crème” – at the Marcia Blaine School, but in the end the same gifts will cause her downfall. “Give me a girl at an impressionable age,” she boasts, “and she is mine for life.” Eventually that prediction will be fulfilled in the saddest way imaginable.

It is, as Miss Brodie says, “nineteen-thirty-six. The age of chivalry is dead.” The novel’s theme, deftly laid out in a narrative that flashes backwards and forwards, to and from the 1930s, is the education of six wonderfully distinctive, heartless and romantic 10-year-old girls (Monica, Sandy, Rose, Mary, Jenny, and Eunice) and the covert classroom drama that leads to Miss Brodie’s “betrayal”, her peremptory dismissal from Marcia Blaine by her great enemy, the headmistress, Miss Mackay. That, of course, has nothing to do with school, and everything to do with sex, and the art teacher, Teddy Lloyd, with whom Miss Brodie (defiantly in her “prime”) is hopelessly in love.

It had been Miss Brodie’s plan to control and manipulate the lives of “her girls”. But finally, it is Sandy who, before she becomes Sister Helena of the Transfiguration, exacts the decisive revenge that will doom her teacher to a bitter and solitary spinsterhood. Miss Brodie will never get over it, and die quite soon. ““Whatever possessed you?” said Miss Brodie in a very Scottish way, as if Sandy had given away a pound of marmalade to an English duke.”

In real life, the character of Miss Brodie was based in part on Christina Kay, a teacher of Spark’s for two years at her Edinburgh school, James Gillespie’s School for Girls. the author would later write of her thus: “What filled our minds with wonder and made Christina Kay so memorable was the personal drama and poetry within which everything in her classroom happened.” Miss Kay was the basis for the good parts of Brodie’s character, but also some of the more bizarre. For example, Miss Kay did hang posters of Renaissance paintings on the wall, and also of Mussolini marching with Italian fascists.

Read from LitChart about the following themes:

Authority and Social Groups

Education vs. Intrusion

One’s Prime, and Spinsterhood

Some other themes

Opening minds

“To me education is a leading out of what is already there in the pupil’s soul.”

Miss Brodie takes the girls to art galleries, museums, and to see the poorer areas of their city:

“It was Sandy’s first experience of a foreign country, which intimates itself by its new smells and shapes and its new poor.”

Each Saturday, she invites them to tea. She tells them about her fiancé who died in the Great War, her travels, her admiration for Mussolini, her opinions of the other teachers, and more besides.

Betrayal

"It's only possible to betray where loyalty is due."

(Said by a nun, towards the end.)

This is a Big Theme, oft mentioned. Miss Brodie goes to different protestant denominations every Sunday, but "was not in any doubt... that God was on her side whatever her course, and so she experienced no difficulty or sense of hypocrisy in worship" when she did not abide by the accepted rules of the church. She is "driven by an excessive lack of guilt" and thinks Catholicism is mere superstition. However, Biblical betrayal and sectarian differences are secondary.

Miss Brodie’s “more advanced and seditious” methods are not appreciated in the genteel girls’ school, and she’s aware the headmistress wants an excuse to force her out. She cultivates her Brodie Set to take her side and report to her when that’s been necessary, emphasising that her “leading out” approach is the opposite of putting her ideas in their heads. We also know from early on, and repeatedly thereafter, that someone will betray her. We assume it’s one of the six.

There’s another important betrayal that’s never mentioned outright. Should a teacher put her pupils in such a position in the first place? Regardless, Miss Brodie creates far more questionable situations, with damaging outcomes for three girls, including one not in Miss Brodie’s set, but acting under her influence.

Technique, Style, Characterization

“The prime of Miss Jean Brodie” takes us back to the Edinburgh of the thirties. School mistress Miss Jean Brodie has selected six of her students to take as confidants. These girls will be the recipients of Miss Brodie’s unorthodox education that includes fictionalized versions of her love affairs magnified by her need to prolong her “prime” as much as possible.

The resulting story revolves around the complex, humoristic and even a bit extravagant relationship that Miss Brodie develops with her girls, who grow up under the shadow of their teacher's frustrations and contradictions: quite liberal in certain areas, Miss Brodie's radical conservatism shows in her admiration for fascist ideals. Caught in the swirling emotions of her overly dramatized romances, Miss Brodie underestimates the powerful influence she has over the lives of these impressionable young women that will lead one of them to betray her trust.

--Spark uses a unique technique through which she unfolds the personalities and the outcome of the characters. Many of the transcendental events are revealed in flash forwards that recur in a pattern of descriptive attributes of the already adult women, so the reader knows from the beginning what the future will have in store for the Brodie set: where will Rose's magnetic sexuality lead her? Or Mary Macgregor's clumsiness? Or Jenny's natural beauty?

--There's a third person narrator in this book, and therefore the narrator is the one who pulls the strings. The narrator/author gives the characters their roles, and controls their fates.

-The main character and the narrator are one and the same person: Miss Sandy Stranger, aged ten when we first meet her. Of course, Sandy lets us *think* there's a narrator, but in reality the entire story is being told by Sandy herself. It's a kind of double act. If you look closely, you'll see that there isn't a single episode she couldn't have witnessed or heard about. And there's a clue about her 'authorship' of the story early in the book: *The Transfiguration of the Commonplace*. That's the title of a book that we are told Sandy will write in later life. It's ostensibly a psychology textbook about the perception of moral issues and how to act on them, but here's the thing: Sandy's 'Transfiguration' book is really this book, the 'Miss Jean Brodie' book. It's a very *economical* method, this double act, just as in the case of Teddy Lloyd's portraits of the Brodie set which simultaneously looked like the sitter and also like Miss Brodie.

- Most remarkable example of transfiguration concerns a piece of tinned pineapple. Here we are verging on transubstantiation: *To Sandy the unfamiliar pineapple had the authentic taste and appearance of happiness and she focussed her small eyes closely on the pale gold cubes before she scooped them up in her spoon, and she thought the sharp taste on her tongue was that of a special happiness, which was nothing to do with eating...*

-Spark's narrative is crisply and wryly witty, subtly ironic in its tone.

"Would that I had been given charge of you girls when you were seven. I sometimes fear it's too late, now. If you had been mine when you were seven you would have been the crème de la crème. Sandy, come and read some stanzas and let us hear your vowel sounds."

--It's brilliantly structured. Spark has a mastery over her material, which few writers that I know have. She moves from time frame to time frame or from reality to imaginative fantasy, frequently without any transition.

--The plot concerns the unconventional schoolteacher, Miss Jean Brodie, and tells how she seeks to influence a chosen group of schoolgirls - the so-called 'Brodie Set'. They are introduced to us as six pre-adolescent girls and are charming but flawed. Their fates are something that you end caring for deeply.

--When Spark introduces one of her set, we are first exposed to her style:

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. She heard no screams, for the roar of the fire drowned the screams, she gave no scream, for the smoke was choking her. [...] But at the beginning of the nineteen-thirties, when Mary Macgregor was ten, there she was sitting blankly among Miss Brodie's pupils. "Who has spilled ink on the floor - was it you, Mary?"

--As she plays with her narrative, going forward and backward in time, and going into the fanciful daydreams of the girls - particularly in the figure of Miss Brodie's most promising student, Sandy - the story reads so easily that it could delude the reader to think it was effortlessly done.

--This seems to be the perfect description of Miss Jean Brodie:

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. 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.

Much of the novel is relayed through the eyes of Sandy, who becomes a confidante of the teacher. Miss Brodie virtually wages war on the school; as the beleaguered headmistress, Miss Mackay attempts to reign in her disturbing influence on the girls and find a way to force the teacher to resign. It is true that Miss Brodie tends to tell the girls about her ideas and love affairs, rather than drilling them with their lessons, but they are still her '*creme de la creme*'.

"You know," Sandy said, "these are supposed to be the happiest days of our lives."

"Yes, they are always saying that," Jenny said. "They say, make the most of your schooldays because you never know what lies ahead of you."

"Miss Brodie says prime is best," Sandy said.

"Yes, but she never got married like our mothers and fathers."

"They don't have primes," said Sandy.

"They have sexual intercourse," Jenny said.

The novel shows Spark's use of irony, humor, and finely controlled development. The author shines at character sketches, not only of Miss Brodie and her set, but also gives us considerable portraits of the one armed art teacher, the shy music teacher, and even the limited but funny and rather inept and awkward headmistress.

Spark catches accurately the malleable, romantic, changing perceptions of her supposedly sheltered girls as they grow up.

-Brodie's is a tight-knit group, but, inevitably, one of her charges begins to see the dangers of Brodie's self-centered agenda, ending up betraying her. In the narrative, we read how Miss Brodie defines her pupils, Sandy, she calls *insightful*. Others are regarded as *knowledgeable about sex* or even *stupid*. Thus, we start to see how the teacher becomes a despot. We know for a fact that mentors, as any human being, are not always what they seem. Miss Brodie seems herself to reveal aspects of adolescent rebellion. And she revels in her influence, while her protégés are forced to mature too quickly. Miss Brodie admits openly how the admiration of her impressionable set is important to her:

"Give me a girl at an impressionable age, and she is mine for life."

Miss Brodie *in her prime* becomes an idealized and nurturing teacher for certain selected students. She repeatedly tells the girls their destinies as she sees them (and not always nicely); she goes to the extreme of encouraging one of them to have an affair with a married man, exactly the art teacher whom Miss Brodie seems to love.

"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 an 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. And there was no pressing hurry in the matter, for Miss Brodie liked to take her leisure over the unfolding of her plans, most of the joy deriving from the preparation, [...]"

-At the same time, her humanity and flaws are all too clear - she idealizes Hitler, Franco, and Mussolini. The novel is set in the cultural backdrop of 1930's Edinburgh, and its puritanical environment. The wider background also appears in the Spanish civil war and the rise of fascism, which Miss Brodie fiercely and naively admires. However, this has to be viewed in its historical context, since fascist sympathies were fairly common in Britain before the war.

- The *fascisti* are very present for the Brodie set:

"It occurred to Sandy [...] 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. That was all right, but it seemed, too, that Miss Brodie's disapproval of the Girl Guides had jealousy in it, there was an inconsistency, a fault. Perhaps the Guides were too much a rival fascisti, and Miss Brodie could not bear it. Sandy thought she might see about joining the Brownies. Then the group-fright seized her again, and it was necessary to put the idea aside, because she loved Miss Brodie."

-Spark's vivid characterizations becomes an incantation-like repetition of certain phrases like '*creme de la creme*' or '*in my prime*'.

She is strong-willed and determined, intelligent and independent, and yet she is vulnerable because she wants so desperately to be revered by 'her girls' and be loved by the men in her otherwise lonely life.

Read and consider the following quotes from the novel

- “Vastly informed on a lot of subjects irrelevant to the authorised curriculum.”
 - “The unfamiliar pineapple had the authentic taste and appearance of happiness.”
 - “Goodness, Truth and Beauty come first.”
 - “Art is greater than science... Art and religion first; then philosophy; lastly science.”
 - “[Teachers] who had stalked past Miss Brodie... saying ‘good morning’ with predestination in their smiles.”
 - “Dazzled by their new subjects... [until] the languages of physics and chemistry, algebra and geometry had lost their elemental strangeness... and become hard work.”
 - “He looked at her with love and she looked at him severely and possessively.”
 - “She looked... with the near-blackmailing insolence of her knowledge.”
 - “Everyone likes to visit a nun, it provides a spiritual sensation.”
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