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The Denial of the Self: The Romantic Imagination and the  
Problem of Belief in Muriel Spark's *The Prime of Miss Jean  
Brodie* (1961)

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This work is dedicated to the memory of William McIlroy (1929-2007) and Alistair McIlroy (1965-2010).

## Abstract

This thesis investigates the treatment, form and function of Romanticism and the Romantic imagination in Muriel Spark's *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie* (1961). Critical engagement with the work of Spark has marginalised Romanticism as an important influence on *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie*, and this study seeks to develop new critical perspectives which emphasise the centrality of the hitherto overlooked Romantic imagination in Spark's novel. Recent recognition of *Child Of Light* (1951) – Spark's study of Mary Shelley – as an important piece of Romantic criticism provides the catalyst for enquiry into Spark's treatment of the Romantic in *Jean Brodie*. By undertaking a comparative reading of *Jean Brodie* and *Frankenstein*, while referencing Spark's criticism in *Child Of Light*, this study will contend that although Spark's novel can be placed within the Scottish literary trajectory identified by G. Gregory Smith as the 'Caledonian anti-syzygy' (1919), *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie* owes an equal debt to Shelley's *Frankenstein* specifically, and Romantic literature and art in general. Spark's treatment of the solipsism that evolves from Romanticism's emphasis on the self is considered alongside John Henry Newman's assertion of the beneficial conflict between authority and private judgement, as outlined by Benilde Montgomery (1997). The portrayal of the various Romantic artists who populate *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie*, and their exemption from dominant moral codes, are considered within the context of Romanticism's aesthetic, secular and sacred modes of transfiguration. Spark's narrative techniques are scrutinised within the triangulation of postmodernism, religion, and Romanticism, in order to illuminate the engagement with the Romantic imagination in *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie*.

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## Introduction

Muriel Spark's fiction can arguably be characterised as the attempt to resolve the problem of having Catholicism as a belief and Romanticism as an influence, while endeavouring to portray this struggle through a contemporary worldview. Spark's most famous novel, *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie* (1961), interrogates these themes and raises the question which has troubled readers and critics since the publication of her first novel *The Comforters* (1957); what kind of novelist is Spark? Frances Russell Hart asks:

Shall we 'place' Muriel Spark in the 'Gothic' tradition deriving from the late enlightenment, or in its romantic aftergrowth, Natural Supernaturalism? [...] Shall we associate her instead with the mock-Gothic? [...] Is she affiliated with the later nineteenth-century development, the psychological 'ghost story'? [...] It may be that – in the puzzling cliché of literary historians – her fiction has grown out of such traditions.<sup>1</sup>

Indeed it has, cliché or not. The traditions that Hart identifies – Gothic, Natural Supernaturalism, mock-Gothic and the psychological ghost story – can all be seen as products of a Romantic outlook, either as a Romantic reaction to the enlightenment, or as development of the psychological, inward-looking nature of the Romantic psyche.

Despite this, it has become critical orthodoxy to view Spark solely within the contexts of Catholicism or postmodernism. Yet Spark's writing is full of the influence of Romanticism. Because she uses it as a springboard from which to launch her more modern concerns, Romanticism is overlooked, simply a point of departure, subsequently jettisoned for the more fashionable ideologies of postmodernist and theoretical analysis. But this does scant justice to her use of Romantic topoi and the Romantic imagination, and it fails to address how and why she uses the Romantic, and to what end.

Throughout her work Spark interrogates Romantic ideas and the Romantic imagination. In many ways, the disparity and resulting friction between the Enlightenment

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<sup>1</sup> Francis Russell Hart, 'Ridiculous Demons', in *Muriel Spark: An Odd Capacity for Vision*, ed. by Alan Bold (London: Vision Press Limited, 1984), pp.23-43 (pp. 23-24).

and the Romantic epochs that she identifies in *Child Of Light* (1951), her study of Mary Shelley, allows us to understand her writing as the attempt to navigate the frictions of her own disparate ideological concerns in much the same manner as Mary Shelley in *Frankenstein* (1818), some hundred and forty years before. This uneasy coexistence is evident from Spark's first novel *The Comforters*, with its metafictional structure and consideration of layered authorship, and the resultant debate on authorial authority. But within the metafictional concerns of its novel-within-a-novel structure, it also interrogates Romantic notions of the self, of the poet or author as a prophet figure, of the role of reverie, illness, and madness in artistic creation, and of the Romantic artist and the extent to which this is a self-constructed persona. The notion of the poet as hero or protagonist is central in *The Comforters*, and the autobiographical material of Spark's conversion to Catholicism and her mental breakdown are evident in the experiences of Caroline Rose.

*The Mandelbaum Gate* (1965) is less overtly concerned with postmodernist literary techniques than preceding novels such as *The Comforters*, *Memento Mori* (1959) and *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie* (1961), yet Spark still uses the technique of prolepsis to reveal the Gardnors as the double agents midway through the novel. As with *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie*, *The Driver's Seat* (1970), and *Not to Disturb* (1971), this shifts the emphasis from what will happen to why it will happen, from action to internal psychological motivation. This disruption of the linear narrative can be read as a postmodern device, recreating the fragmentary nature of experience and the irregular, fractured way in which we receive information. However, for Spark, her motivation has its roots in her belief of an omniscient God who sees all without impinging upon the free agency of mankind. This will be returned to in greater depth in a subsequent chapter.

Romantic themes are prevalent throughout *The Mandelbaum Gate*. Predominant are those outlined by Spark in *Child Of Light*, where she talks of the clash of 'fixed religious beliefs with science', and of 'imaginative and emotional substitutes for religion with

scientific rationalism'.<sup>2</sup> Boundaries, such as Barbara's identity, are blurred in this novel; is she Jewish or Catholic, or partly both? The borders between territories are in constant dispute. In contrast, the line between science and religion remains clear: 'If you are looking for physical exactitude in Jerusalem it is a good quest, but it belongs to archaeology, not faith'.<sup>3</sup> The conflicts that define the Enlightenment and Romantic eras are the same conflicts that arise in *The Mandelbaum Gate*; faith versus reason, emotion versus science, imagination versus empiricism, or put more simply; what we believe versus what we see.

Spark portrays these thematic tensions on the personal, intimate level. Barbara's lover Harry Clegg is a renowned archaeologist, searching for 'physical exactitude'<sup>4</sup> while Barbara searches for her faith. Yet Harry's scientific quest has consequences for Barbara's faith as he is searching for the Dead Sea Scrolls, and they find an uneasy resolution, enabled to marry by the end of the novel. This archaeological uncovering of the physical exactitude of material reality is also played out in the novel's depiction of the spying and counter-espionage that takes place throughout, contrasted with Barbara's search for religious truth, for a truth that lies beyond scientific proof. As Fr. Ballantyne states, 'There's no need for faith if everything is plain to the eye'.<sup>5</sup>

This also signals a predominant mode of thought in Spark's work. While these disparate ideologies are often in conflict, they repeatedly coexist uneasily side by side, effecting a negation or impasse that problematises any over-simplistic reading of the moral, theological or ideological dilemmas at the core of the text. Speaking of Victor Frankenstein, Spark says that he is reminiscent of 'those eighteenth-century geniuses [...] whose too-perfect balance of imaginative and rational faculties did in fact so often disintegrate and ultimately destroy them' (*Child Of Light*, p.138), and all of Spark's fiction

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<sup>2</sup> Muriel Spark, *Child Of Light: A Reassessment of Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley* (Hadleigh: Tower Bridge Publications Limited, 1951), p. 138, pp.138-139. Subsequent references will be incorporated within the text, and abbreviated to 'Child Of Light'.

<sup>3</sup> Muriel Spark, *The Mandelbaum Gate* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books Ltd, 1985), p.198. First published by Macmillan in 1965.

<sup>4</sup> Spark, *The Mandelbaum Gate*, p.198.

<sup>5</sup> Spark, *The Mandelbaum Gate*, p.199.



is concerned with the consequences of these imbalances of emotion and intellect, faith and science, aesthetics and empiricism.

*The Mandelbaum Gate* is also concerned with the romantic concept of the poet as heroine, with Spark's own hyphenated heritage and her trip to the Holy Land reflected in the experiences of Barbara Vaughan. Along with Caroline Rose in *The Comforters*, Fleur Talbot in *Loitering With Intent* (1981), and much of *The Girls of Slender Means* (1963) and *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie*, this autobiographical inward-looking tendency involves 'typically, solitary figures engaged in a long – and sometimes infinitely elusive – quest'.<sup>6</sup> Caroline's writing and her attempts to understand the voices she hears, Fleur's efforts to manoeuvre through blackmail and counter-blackmail, ironically while compiling so-called biographies of the famous, and Barbara's pilgrimage can all be viewed in these terms. These autobiographical tendencies have their origin in romanticism, and the notion of the poet-heroine also raises the central concept of the romantic artist.

Just as the French and American Revolutions provided the Romantic era with a political and poetic reaction to the authority of Augustan, Neoclassical and Enlightenment modes of thought, so too does *The Mandelbaum Gate* interrogate the concepts of political, moral, religious and cultural authority. The political fight for authority over the contested territories and the associated struggle for recognition of religious authority revolving around the heart of Jerusalem are played against Barbara's struggle to understand her own contentious identity. Who has the right to act with, or to use, authority becomes increasingly problematic in such a highly volatile and contested political, religious and cultural arena. The Ecclesiastical Courts are considering the validity of Harry Clegg's marriage, and this is contrasted on a wider scale with the ongoing Eichmann trial. God is always present in any discussion on authority in Spark's work, and the setting provides numerous subplots which are all to be considered in light of Spark's belief in the ultimate

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<sup>6</sup> M. H. Abrams, *A Glossary of Literary Terms: Fifth Edition* (Orlando FL: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, Inc., 1985), p.116.

authority of God. Barbara states this explicitly, saying that ‘Either the whole of life is unified under God or everything falls apart’.<sup>7</sup> This investigation of ultimate authority is present throughout Spark’s fiction.

With the publication of *The Driver’s Seat* and *Not to Disturb*, Spark’s novels take on a distinctly contemporary feel, embracing elements of the nouveau roman movement by dispensing with insight into the characters’ thought-processes. Indeed, these novels are pivotal points in Spark’s career in that they dismiss the interiority of her previous work in favour of a typically postmodernist focus on act and dialogue. Her favoured technical reliance on flashback and flash-forward is present, and here the focus is on individual motivation, but also on the inevitability of any course of action. Speaking of *The Driver’s Seat* and *Not To Disturb*, Valerie Shaw notes that ‘Lise’s death is preordained – indeed self-ordained – and so is the murder which will make the servants their fortunes’.<sup>8</sup> The thread that links these novels to the romantic themes in Spark’s other work is authority and submission of the self, and authority and submission to external hegemonic structures such as education, police and state, and – as ever with Spark – religion.

It is in *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie* that all of these themes and concerns coalesce to the greatest degree. It provides the most fruitful basis for discussion due in large part to what David Lodge calls ‘the uncontrolled romantic sensibility’<sup>9</sup> of its central character, and the way in which she subsequently clashes with those around her. Throughout the novel, Romanticism comes into violent contact with opposing ideologies. This is played out in the conflicts between science and art, reason and emotion, the sacred and the profane, and the individual against a variety of hegemonic power structures.

Miss Brodie’s Romantic sensibility manifests itself in a number of ways, and in particular, the Romantic artist is a central figure in *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie*.

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<sup>7</sup> Spark, *The Mandelbaum Gate*, p.283.

<sup>8</sup> Valerie Shaw, ‘Muriel Spark’, in *The History of Scottish Literature, Volume 4: Twentieth Century*, ed. by Cairns Craig (Aberdeen: Aberdeen University Press, 1987), pp.277-290 (p.286).

<sup>9</sup> David Lodge, *The Novelist at the Crossroads and Other Essays on Fiction and Criticism* (London and New York: Ark Paperbacks, 1971) p.132.

Inspired by the works of Rossetti, Botticelli and Giotto, and the writing of Tennyson, Hogg and Burns, Miss Brodie is fascinated by the artistic process and fashions herself as muse to the art teacher Teddy Lloyd. She allows all artistic figures a leniency of behaviour on account of their creative abilities. Teddy Lloyd's smashing of a plate is dismissed because 'He has the artistic temperament, of course', while the great Pavlova screaming at her chorus 'is permissible in a great artist'.<sup>10</sup> The novel depicts the ways in which Miss Brodie Romanticises her own life experiences, showing her substituting artistic passions for religion and raising her everyday surroundings to the sublime via a process of imaginative aesthetic elevation.

This aestheticising of her everyday existence is part of the novel's central theme, 'The Transfiguration of the Commonplace' (*Jean Brodie*, p.35). The title of Sister Helena's 'odd psychological treatise on the nature of moral perception' (*Jean Brodie*, p.35) alerts the reader to the conflict at the core of the novel. On one hand, the transfigurational effects of art on Miss Brodie are clear, as it enables her to elevate her day-to-day experiences to the level where she sees herself, and those she elects, as artistic figures, (re)enacting great artistic works through their own experiences. This is Miss Brodie's attempt to elevate the banality of her existence by a process of aesthetic self-elevation. Yet the title of Sister Helena's treatise implies a religious or spiritual and sacramental element to everyday existence that Miss Brodie rejects, while 'moral perception' (*Jean Brodie*, p.35) is concerned with the individual's ability to understand the nature of a moral dilemma before deciding which course of action to pursue, a perception that seems beyond Miss Brodie.

These contradictory elements return us to the core of Spark's attempts to resolve the problem of the Romantic, the spiritual, and the modern coexisting. At the heart of this conundrum is the way in which the echo of Calvinism in Edinburgh seeps into Miss

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<sup>10</sup> Muriel Spark, *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books Ltd, 1971), p.80, pp.62-63. First published by MacMillan, 1961. All subsequent references will be enclosed within the text, and abbreviated to '*Jean Brodie*'.

Brodie's particular strain of self-realisation and subsequent self-absolution. Rejecting Catholicism as a religion for people who cannot think for themselves, she also rejects any notion of anyone else's spiritual authority despite her evening classes in comparative religion, and instead elects herself to grace, seeing herself as 'the God of Calvin' (*Jean Brodie*, p.120). What is unclear is whether Spark sees Miss Brodie's inability to accept a higher reality as a lack of vision, or as a misinterpretation of the Romantic imagination, and this will be central to my subsequent discussion.

In perhaps the most direct investigation of Muriel Spark's use of Romanticism, Paddy Lyons invokes the words of D.H. Lawrence: 'Never trust the artist. Trust the tale'.<sup>11</sup> The premise of Lyons' article, 'Muriel Spark's Break with Romanticism', is that the notion of the sublime artist whose work was 'elevated through Romantic gesturing towards the sacred'<sup>12</sup> is anachronistic in the twentieth century. Rejecting the idea that the modern author resembles the sublime artist of the Romantic era, Lyons states that '[t]hroughout her novelistic career Muriel Spark [...] was lucidly opposed to the elevation of authorship as the lynchpin of writing'.<sup>13</sup> Lyons says that 'Propelling this argument is opposition to the Romantic embrace of authorship',<sup>14</sup> and he cites a number of authors, including Borges, Nabokov, Samuel Beckett and Flann O'Brien, who correspond to Spark's position, writers who reject this notion of artistic sublimity.

Randall Stevenson notes the similarity between author and protagonist in their roles as storytellers and character manipulators. He says that Miss Brodie's

penchant for forcing reality into accord with her vision – for fictions, art, and “making patterns with facts” generally [...] – also contributes to a role as an author-analogue, raising questions about the nature and ethics of writing familiar to the *nouveau roman* and postmodernist literature generally.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> D. H. Lawrence, *Studies in Classic American Literature* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books Ltd, 1977), p.8. First published in 1923.

<sup>12</sup> Paddy Lyons, 'Muriel Spark's Break with Romanticism', in *The Edinburgh Companion to Muriel Spark*, ed. by Michael Gardiner and Willy Maley (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2010), pp.85-97 (p.86).

<sup>13</sup> Lyons (2010), p.85.

<sup>14</sup> Lyons (2010), p.86.

<sup>15</sup> Randall Stevenson, 'A Postmodern Scotland?', in *Beyond Scotland: New Contexts for Twentieth-Century Scottish Literature* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2004), pp.209-228 (p.212).

Spark has acknowledged the influence of the *nouveau roman*, and the manner in which Miss Brodie attempts to control or manoeuvre her girls undoubtedly resembles that of an author. Indeed, Vladimir Nabokov - one of Lyons' examples – delineates an authorial position that somewhat resembles the messianic tendencies of Miss Brodie:

The design of my novel is fixed in my imagination and every character follows the course I imagine for him. I am the perfect dictator in that private world insofar as I alone am responsible for its stability and truth.<sup>16</sup>

While Nabokov is not expressing a position that accords with that of the sublime artist 'gesturing toward the sacred',<sup>17</sup> he is outlining an authorial stance which is similar to the narrative structure of *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie*, and which parallels the themes of power and authority which run throughout the novel. Margery Palmer McCulloch reads Spark's novel in just such a way, where the author retains control over her characters in the dictatorial manner that Nabokov outlines. McCulloch states:

The fact that some of Miss Brodie's girls do not reach the heights of achievement she has intended for them is the consequence not of fictive character development but of Spark the author asserting her supremacy over her characters, making her role as creator/manipulator manifest and overturning the erroneous assumptions of her principal character Jean Brodie.<sup>18</sup>

However, rather than seeing her in terms of postmodernism – as Randall Stevenson, above, does – McCulloch claims that 'what we see here is Spark as modernist novelist, foregrounding the narrative process and the fictive nature of her work'.<sup>19</sup> This subsequently refines the question posed at the outset – what kind of novelist is Spark? – and more specifically, is Spark to be regarded as a modernist or a postmodernist? Given that

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<sup>16</sup> Alfred Appell Jr., 'An Interview with Vladimir Nabokov', *Wisconsin Studies in Contemporary Literature* 7, 2 (1967): 127-152, (p.133).

<sup>17</sup> Lyons (2010) p.86.

<sup>18</sup> Margery Palmer McCulloch, 'Nasty Surprises and a Kind of Truth', in *Odd Alliances: Scottish Studies in European Contexts*, ed. by Neil McMillan and Kirsten Stirling (Glasgow: Cruithne Press, 1999), pp.90-99 (p.92).

<sup>19</sup> McCulloch (1999), p.93.

Stevenson and McCulloch arrive at alternative definitions, it is not surprising that this is a contested area in Spark criticism. Matthew Wickman provides some much-needed clarity, noting that '[o]ur difficulty arises not only from asking whether Spark's work corresponds with features of postmodern fiction, but also from uncertainties about what postmodernism is', before observing that 'the polarities of modernism and postmodernism often inhabit the same text'.<sup>20</sup> As readers we are therefore alerted to the contested critical territory and the dangers in being too rigid in applying critical terminology to Spark who, for Wickman, defies such attempts. He notes that 'Spark's writing is less about its conformity to elegant paradigms than the havoc it wreaks on them',<sup>21</sup> echoing the words of Joseph Hynes who states that 'Spark is decidedly a "both/and" writer, rather than an "either/or" writer'.<sup>22</sup> Negotiating the territory between Lyons' view of Spark as a 'post' or 'beyond-Romantic' writer, Stevenson's 'postmodernist' and McCulloch's 'modernist', will – alongside Spark's use of Romanticism and the positioning of her beliefs, and an awareness of the critical acuteness of Wickman and Hynes – be a focus of discussion below.

Returning to *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie*, Margery Palmer McCulloch identifies the same author-analogue as Randall Stevenson, but sees this as Spark's investigation of Calvinist predestination as embodied in the author-God analogue. For McCulloch, this is seen through the filter of Spark's Scottish identity:

In her narrative form, then, Spark employs her Scottish heritage in a detached, witty, ironic, and ambivalent way, while philosophically she again subverts Calvinist determinism in her authorial rewriting of scenarios – something not possible in the actual context of the elect and the damned. There are in fact two Calvinist God-authors in *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie*: Spark herself, manipulating fictional form, making patterns with facts, showing us how she creates and controls her characters, leading them to the end she has predestined; and her creation, Miss Jean Brodie, who attempts to predetermine the lives her chosen girls will lead.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Matthew Wickman, 'Spark, Modernism and Postmodernism', in *The Edinburgh Companion to Muriel Spark*, ed. by Michael Gardiner and Willy Maley (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2010), pp.63-73 (p.63).

<sup>21</sup> Wickman (2010), p.66.

<sup>22</sup> Joseph Hynes, ed., *Critical Essays on Muriel Spark* (New York: G. K. Hall & Co., 1992), p.2.

<sup>23</sup> McCulloch (1999), p.92.

It is worth noting the distinction in this passage between Spark, who McCulloch renders in terms of creation, control and predestiny, and Miss Brodie, who ‘attempts’ the same, but is herself the product of Spark’s imagination.<sup>24</sup>

McCulloch’s identification of two Calvinist God-authors brings us to the question of Spark’s Scottish heritage and how this informs her novel. *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie* is Spark’s only novel set entirely in Scotland, and critical debate on this particular work often focuses on the influence of Scotland, primarily in terms of literature and religion, and Edinburgh. Burns, Hogg and Robert Louis Stevenson are the Scottish literary antecedents referenced throughout, and the recurring motif of duality or the double can be traced directly through Scottish literary and posited cultural precedents. The most famous of these is G. Gregory Smith’s ‘Caledonian anti-syzygy’, where the ‘sudden jostling of contraries’ such as ‘real life and romance, everyday fact and the supernatural, things holy and things profane’ are found to coexist throughout Scottish literature in the form of ‘the ‘polar twins’ of the Scottish Muse’.<sup>25</sup> Alan Bold sees *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie* containing just such dualities, with Sandy and Miss Brodie being inextricably bound together, while both characters invoke contradictory reactions in the reader, tending to attract and repulse simultaneously. Bold identifies the novel’s ambiguous scheme, saying:

Like many other Scots, Miss Brodie is full of contradictions. She idolises the fascists yet is against the team spirit; she speaks of love and freedom yet sleeps with the dreary Mr Lowther and denies herself to one-armed Teddy Lloyd because he is married; she loves Rome and the Italians yet she is against the Church of Rome.<sup>26</sup>

These contradictions are identified by Bold and others as being part of a literary trajectory which can be traced back through Scottish writers such as Hogg, whose *The Private*

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<sup>24</sup> See also Cairns Craig’s *The Modern Scottish Novel: Narrative and the National Imagination* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1999), for a thorough investigation of the Scottish literary tradition and its troubled relationship with Calvinism, the the Romantic imagination. This will be addressed in my subsequent Doctoral studies, and my thanks go to Dr. Aaron Kelly for alerting me to this.

<sup>25</sup> G. Gregory Smith, *Scottish Literature: Character and Influence* (London: Macmillan and Co., 1919), p.4, p.20.

<sup>26</sup> Alan Bold *Modern Scottish Literature* (Harlow: Longman, 1983), p.222.

*Memoirs and Confessions of a Justified Sinner* (1824) interrogates notions of the double and of duality, and Stevenson, whose *Jekyll and Hyde* looms large throughout. Miss Brodie revels in the duality of her ancestor, Deacon Brodie – ‘I am a descendant, do not forget, of Willie Brodie’ (*Jean Brodie*, p.88) – while Alan Bold highlights this connection, stating that Edinburgh is ‘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’.<sup>27</sup> Indeed, when Bold says of *Jekyll and Hyde* that ‘Stevenson added some perennially relevant Scottish topics: the divided personality, the concept of childhood as an idyll, the constant conflict [...] between authority and imagination’,<sup>28</sup> it would be easy to replace Stevenson’s name with that of Spark’s, such are the thematic similarities. Bold’s comments emphasize that these themes were already persistent in Scottish literature, long before Spark’s novel, consequently placing her within a defined Scottish tradition.

Bold takes this Scottish literary antecedent one step further, narrowing the focus to Edinburgh and its own particular version of a dualistic Scottish psyche as embodied within the structure of the city itself. He says that

[t]he novel creates its own claustrophobically close world in which the characters move with moralistic deliberation. It is a real world whose hoped-for ethical purity is destroyed by internal division and external threat. It creaks with the contradictions native to Edinburgh.<sup>29</sup>

These contradictions are evident in Spark’s own words when she describes how Edinburgh is central to her world-view, and to her stance as a writer, embodied in the word ‘nevertheless’:

It is my own instinct to associate the word, as the core of a thought-pattern, with Edinburgh particularly [...] The Castle Rock is something, rising up as it does from pre-history between the formal grace of the New Town and the noble network of the Old. To have a great primitive black crag rising up as it does in the middle of

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<sup>27</sup> Alan Bold, *Muriel Spark* (London: Methuen, 1986), p.64.

<sup>28</sup> Bold (1983), p.103.

<sup>29</sup> Bold (1983), p.223.



populated streets of commerce, stately squares and winding closes, is like the statement of an unmitigated fact preceded by “nevertheless”.<sup>30</sup>

So Spark’s Edinburgh is seen as part of the structure of the novel, its paradigmatic conjunctions of the old and new, poverty and wealth, the primitive and the enlightened, jostling for supremacy and coexisting despite, perhaps because of, each other.

There is, however, another precedent beyond those of the Scottish literary tradition, Edinburgh, or the ‘Caledonian anti-syzygy’.<sup>31</sup> Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein, Or The Modern Prometheus* looms large throughout *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie*. The relationship between Miss Brodie and Sandy closely resembles that between Victor Frankenstein and his creation the Monster, and the thematic content of Spark’s novel bears an overwhelming resemblance to that of *Frankenstein*. Mary’s investigation of the Romantic imagination and the danger when imagination and reason become fractured are identified explicitly by Spark in *Child Of Light* and are central to understanding *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie*, and indeed all of Spark’s fiction.

Alongside Stevenson’s *Jekyll and Hyde* and Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein*, James Hogg’s *The Private Memoirs and Confessions of a Justified Sinner* stands as a key text in the attempt to understand *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie*. Hogg’s novel makes great capital from the fragmentary elements inherent within Smith’s ‘Caledonian anti-syzygy’<sup>32</sup> as manifest in Stevenson’s novel, and it occupies the same territory of reason versus emotion and science versus faith that Shelley’s novel interrogates. Indeed, Hogg’s novel is set partly in the schizophrenic world of Spark’s ‘nevertheless’ Edinburgh, and it stands alongside *Frankenstein* as one of the great works of the romantic period.

Margery Palmer McCulloch also acknowledges the importance of Edinburgh as the setting and its influence upon the novel. However, she sees the most important aspects of the novel within the context of Spark’s ‘response to Calvinism and the way in which this

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<sup>30</sup> Muriel Spark, ‘Edinburgh-born’, in *Critical Essays on Muriel Spark*, ed. by Joseph Hynes (New York: G. K. Hall, 1992), pp.21-23 (p.22). Reprinted from *New Statesman* 64 (10 august 1962): 180.

<sup>31</sup> Smith (1919), p.4.

<sup>32</sup> Smith (1919), p.4.

has shaped both narrative method and philosophical theme'<sup>33</sup> in *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie*. Crucial to this is the way in which Spark herself is from Edinburgh, yet in exile from it. Spark's 'status as an outsider [...] and therefore outwith the prevailing Scottish Presbyterian ethos'<sup>34</sup> enables her to utilise and critique these particular strains of the Scottish religious and cultural identity deeply embedded in the Edinburgh setting. McCulloch continues, saying that 'Calvinism becomes part of the narrative process of the novel, the sharp, witty, and ambivalent tool of her fiction, as opposed to the source of an overt and intense moral battle'.<sup>35</sup> She sees this as central to the novel's structure and use of flashback and flash-forward which, arguably, resembles the Calvinist belief in predestination, illustrated by Spark when she reveals the fate of the characters long before the novel's end. Spark's disjunction of linear narrative and chronology readjusts the reader's focus in order that, in the words of Gerard Carruthers, 'the moral dynamic of the action rather than simply the action itself is placed in the foreground'.<sup>36</sup> In doing so, Spark problematises and undermines any attempt on the reader's behalf of finding any clear moral stance, or any obvious distinction as to who is right or wrong.

The schizophrenic nature of the Scottish or Edinburgh psyche again appears to be invoked, but there are clear theological and philosophical concerns at play. These are invoked when Alan Massie identifies what he sees as the author's moral dilemma, stating that '[h]er problem is how to write about religion in an age that has lost its faith'.<sup>37</sup> Miss Brodie does not initially seem at odds with such a position. We are told that '[s]he always went to church on Sunday mornings, she had a rota of different denominations and sects [...] hardly ever missing a Sunday morning' (*Jean Brodie*, p.85). However, we are soon

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<sup>33</sup> McCulloch (1999) p.92

<sup>34</sup> McCulloch (1999) p.92.

<sup>35</sup> McCulloch (1999) p.92.

<sup>36</sup> Gerard Carruthers, 'The Remarkable Fictions of Muriel Spark', in *A History of Scottish Women's Writing*, ed. by Douglas Gifford and Dorothy McMillan (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1997), pp.514-525 (p.519).

<sup>37</sup> Alan Massie, *Muriel Spark* (Edinburgh: The Ramsay Head Press, 1979), p.45.

informed of her own particular brand of moral relativism, where '[s]he let everyone know she was in no doubt, that God was on her side whatever her course' (*Jean Brodie*, p.85).

This returns us to the Calvinist or antinomian beliefs that lie at the novel's core. For Massie, this signifies a reaction on Spark's part against what can be traced back to Romanticism's elevation of the self as manifest in the notion of the poet as prophet, or the sublime artist. At the conjunction of aesthetics and Calvinism lies the notion that those who are chosen – and here we can read the romantic artist and the Calvinist elect as being conflated – are 'above the moral laws [...] something set apart' (*Jean Brodie*, p.38). Miss Brodie's self-election is therefore an act of what Massie identifies as one of Spark's central concerns, solipsism. He states:

The heresy with which Muriel Spark peculiarly concerns herself is solipsism. The solipsist places himself as the centre of the universe; its only meaning emanates from his perception and his consciousness. Nothing indeed but that consciousness has an assured reality.<sup>38</sup>

Miss Brodie is indeed guilty of just such an 'assured reality', convinced of her own moral and aesthetic supremacy, best embodied in her solipsistic inability to differentiate between the subjective and the objective:

'Who is the greatest Italian painter?'  
 'Leonardo da Vinci, Miss Brodie.'  
 'That is incorrect. The answer is Giotto, he is my favourite.'  
 (*Jean Brodie*, p.11)

This clash of the subjective and the objective is common to the patterning of Spark's novel. Francis Russell Hart reads the central dilemma as a battle between self-assertion and self-surrender, emanating from romanticism's appropriation of Calvinism's focus on the self:

The characters of a Spark novel are a gallery, an obsessive plenitude, representative of a cultural situation. Their behaviours defy their collectivity by various forms of absurd self-assertion, romantic, anarchic, antinomian. The theologian must see

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<sup>38</sup> Alan Massie, 'Calvinism and Catholicism in Muriel Spark', in *Muriel Spark: An Odd Capacity for Vision*, ed. by Alan Bold (London: Vision Press Ltd, 1984), pp.94-110 (p.100).

these self-assertions as diabolical forgeries of true individuality, which is found only through the self-surrender of the orthodox Christian. Yet the artist cannot help but show a creative sympathy for – a humorous nostalgia for – her illusorily free “characters.” She sees the cult of character-worship as an anarchy generated by the romantic egoism that grew from Calvinism.<sup>39</sup>

For Hart, Miss Brodie’s catalogue of romantic and antinomian self-assertions are bizarre, from her self-election to grace to seeing herself as the muse and courtly lover figure Beatrice to Teddy Lloyd’s Rossetti. Marshall Walker echoes this, noting that ‘[i]n the eyes of God and Muriel Spark, as in James Hogg’s, the wickedness of egotism, however damaging it may be, is basically absurd’.<sup>40</sup> Yet the problem for the reader may lie in the attempt to understand Sandy’s behaviour. The quandary is whether her actions, from her betrayal of Miss Brodie to her conversion and subsequent treatise, are to be viewed as similarly absurd forms of self-assertion, as self-surrender to Christian orthodoxy, or as something else entirely.

Despite Calvinism being identified as a diabolical forgery, its similarities with Catholicism – the orthodoxy of self-surrender for Spark and, if only she had the vision to recognise that ‘she was by temperament suited only to the Roman Catholic Church’ (*Jean Brodie*, p.85), Miss Brodie – are highlighted by John Henry Newman. Valerie Shaw says that ‘Cardinal Newman’s observation that Calvinism’s “sharp separation between the elect and the world” contains much that is “cognate or parallel to the Catholic doctrine”’.<sup>41</sup> The result for the reader is the difficulty in identifying ‘which (if any) of the fictional characters is in a state of grace, even in the non-theological sense of simply earning the novelist’s and reader’s approval and goodwill’.<sup>42</sup> Gerard Carruthers echoes this position, stating that ‘The

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<sup>39</sup> Francis Russell Hart, *The Scottish Novel: A Critical Survey* (London: John Murray, 1978), p.303.

<sup>40</sup> Marshall Walker, *Scottish Literature Since 1707* (London: Longman, 1996), p.324.

<sup>41</sup> Shaw (1987), p.281. Shaw quotes from John Henry Newman, *Apologia Pro Vita Sua* (Glasgow: William Collins Sons & Co Ltd, 1977), p.99, p.99. First published in 1864.

<sup>42</sup> Shaw (1987), p.281.

final moral implications of the novel are not clear. As in all her novels, Spark refuses to offer readers secure conclusions'.<sup>43</sup>

We are therefore returned to the difficulty in pinning Spark down. This, however, can also be understood with reference to Spark's theological concerns. Flannery O'Connor talks of the danger of the need for definite answers as a misunderstanding of the Catholic novelist's theological motivation. She says:

We Catholics are very much given to the Instant Answer. Fiction doesn't have any. It leaves us, like Job, with a renewed sense of mystery. St. Gregory wrote that every time the sacred text describes a fact, it reveals a mystery. This is what the fiction writer, on his lesser level, hopes to do.<sup>44</sup>

It is Spark's very mysteriousness that can therefore be seen as central to her methodology as a writer whose concerns are religious and theological. O'Connor's quote reverberates with a sense of the unknown, of the beyond, echoed by Spark when she says

I don't claim that my novels are truth – I claim that they are fiction, out of which a kind of truth emerges [...] I am interested in truth – absolute truth – and I don't pretend that what I'm writing is more than an imaginative extension of the truth.<sup>45</sup>

This imaginative extension of the truth is the revealing of a mystery that O'Connor identifies. A mystery can be revealed, just as a truth can be, but not the absolute mystery or the absolute truth. These answers are available only to God, and the novelist writing from a Catholic perspective will always be aware, in the words of Alan Massie, that 'There can be no definitive answer; human truth and religious truth march out of step'.<sup>46</sup>

Nonetheless, both O'Connor's 'renewed sense of mystery'<sup>47</sup> and Spark's 'imaginative extension of the truth'<sup>48</sup> align with Romanticism's emphasis on the imagination as the

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<sup>43</sup> Carruthers (1997), p.518.

<sup>44</sup> Flannery O'Connor, *Mystery and Manners* (New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1970), p.184.

<sup>45</sup> Spark interviewed in Frank Kermode, 'Muriel Spark's House of Fiction', in *Critical Essays on Muriel Spark*, ed. by Joseph Hynes (New York: G. K. Hall, 1992), pp.29-32, (p.30). Excerpted and reprinted from 'The House of Fiction: Interviews with Seven English Novelists', *Partisan Review* 30, 1 (1963), 61-82.

<sup>46</sup> Massie (1979). pp.51-52.

<sup>47</sup> O'Connor (1970), p.184.

<sup>48</sup> Spark in Kermode (1992), p.30.

conduit to seeing beyond the surface of the everyday, and into mysteries and kinds of truth that await illumination. The place and function of Romanticism in *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie*, alongside the influence of Spark's Catholic beliefs and the impact of the Calvinist atmosphere of Edinburgh, will – in conjunction with her employment of literary devices such as prolepsis – be the focus of the subsequent chapters.

## Chapter 1: The Romantic Imagination: Jean Brodie, Transfiguration, and the Figure of the Romantic Artist

In *A Glossary of Literary Terms*, M.H. Abrams outlines a number of areas that broadly define Romanticism, and he describes these in terms of their relation to the preceding neoclassical period. He begins by emphasising Romanticism's rejection of neoclassic conventions; 'The prevailing attitude favoured innovation instead of traditionalism in the materials, forms and style of literature'.<sup>1</sup> For Abrams, this rejection is manifest in Wordsworth's denunciation of 'the poetic diction of the preceding century'.<sup>2</sup> Wordsworth clearly outlines this in the 'Preface to *Lyrical Ballads* (1800/1802)', where he states:

The principal object, then, which I proposed to myself in these Poems was to chose incidents and situations from common life, and to relate or describe them, throughout, as far as was possible, in a selection of language really used by men; and, at the same time, to throw over them a certain colouring of imagination, whereby ordinary things should be presented to the mind in an unusual way.<sup>3</sup>

The move away from the grand narratives and register of the neoclassical tradition is clearly outlined in the subject matter being drawn from 'common life, and [...] in language really used by men'.<sup>4</sup> Wordsworth also outlines the importance of the transformative power of the imagination, with the result that the poet's surroundings are imbued with a previously unseen symbolic depth and significance. Abrams notes that this leads to the emergence of the poet as prophet or visionary:

The assumption by Blake, Wordsworth, and Shelley of the persona of the poet-prophet who writes a visionary mode of poetry; and the use of poetic symbolism (especially by Blake and Shelley) deriving from a world-view in which objects are charged with a significance beyond their physical qualities.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Abrams (1985), p.115.

<sup>2</sup> Abrams (1985), p.115.

<sup>3</sup> William Wordsworth and Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *Lyrical Ballads and Other Poems* (Ware: Wordsworth Editions Limited, 2003), pp.6-7. First published 1798.

<sup>4</sup> Wordsworth and Coleridge (2003), p.7.

<sup>5</sup> Abrams (1985), p.115.

This use of symbolism and the focus on what lies beyond the viewed object can be understood as ‘[a] yearning aspiration towards something beyond the ordinary world, not necessarily religious, [and] is a typical aspect of “Romanticism”’.<sup>6</sup> The Romantic manifesto presents a radical departure from the poetic etiquette of the preceding period, and this break from neoclassical decorum was also reflected in a move away from the rational and the scientific towards notions of the supernatural and the beyond, which Lascelles Abercrombie identifies as ‘a tendency away from actuality’<sup>7</sup> by the likes of Keats and Coleridge. This notion of what lies beyond is central to *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie*, and Spark explores the way in which the everyday and the mundane become ‘charged with significance’<sup>8</sup> through the recurring motif of transfiguration, in both its secular and sacred contexts.

Abrams then discusses the fundamental shift from poetry as ‘primarily a mirror of men in action’ to the ‘spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings’, where ‘the process of composition, since it is “spontaneous,” is the opposite of the artful manipulation of means to foreseen ends stressed by the neoclassic critics’.<sup>9</sup> Abrams notes that this move represents for Coleridge a progression from the external to the internal, from poetic rules ‘which are imposed by the poet from without’, to the ‘inherent organic “laws” of the poet’s imagination’.<sup>10</sup> This emphasis on the spontaneous and on feelings signals a central concern of many romantic writers, where

Logical thought and understanding, often connected with a scientific, investigative manner of understanding the world, are abandoned in favour of instinctive and immediate feeling, or intuition, or the mind’s capacity to discover through association, rather than forced thought.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Martin Gray, *A Dictionary of Literary Terms* (Harlow: Longman, 1992), p.252.

<sup>7</sup> Lascelles Abercrombie, *Romanticism* (London: High Hill Books, 1963), p41.

<sup>8</sup> Abrams (1985), p.115.

<sup>9</sup> Abrams (1985), pp.115-116.

<sup>10</sup> Abrams (1995), p.116.

<sup>11</sup> Gray (1992), pp.251-252.



This is manifested throughout *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie* in Miss Brodie's rejection of all subjects that can be classified as rational, such as mathematics and science, in favour of those related to the emotional and creative realm. As Miss Brodie says, 'Art and religion first, then philosophy; lastly science. That is the order of the great subjects of life, that's the order of their importance'' (*Jean Brodie*, p.25).

As Martin Gray notes, nature becomes a focus for Romantic writers, 'not for its own sake necessarily, but as a way to understanding the self'.<sup>12</sup> This emphasis on the internal, emotional and imaginative response of the poet has a number of significant consequences. It heralds a new emphasis on the self, where 'writers turn in on themselves and try to explain and evaluate their living relationship with the world about them'.<sup>13</sup> For Abercrombie, this is evident in 'the spirit of the mind withdrawing more and more from commerce with the outer world, and endeavouring, or at least desiring, to rely more and more on the things it finds within itself'.<sup>14</sup> As a result, the Romantics often depict a scenario where 'life in this world is likely to be most satisfactory when the mind withdraws from outer things and turns in on itself. This is the habit of mind which has acquired the name of romanticism'.<sup>15</sup> This subsequently leads to a new autobiographical element to poetry, with Wordsworth's *The Prelude* seen as 'the foremost text of this aspect of "Romanticism", which points directly to the modern, psychological age'.<sup>16</sup> This emphasis on the self also relates back to the notion of the poet-prophet, which in combination with the psychological nature of self-analysis creates a new narrative persona of

Solitary figures [...] often [...] social nonconformists or outcasts. Many important romantic works had as protagonist the isolated rebel, whether for good or ill: Prometheus, Cain, the Wandering Jew, the Satanic hero-villain, or the great outlaw.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Gray (1992), p.252.

<sup>13</sup> Gray (1992), p.252.

<sup>14</sup> Abercrombie (1963), p.41.

<sup>15</sup> Abercrombie (1963), p.42.

<sup>16</sup> Gray (1992), p.252.

<sup>17</sup> Abrams (1985), p.116.

In attempting to understand the inner self or psyche, Romantic poetry often exhibits a rebelliousness borne out of a rejection of current or previous modes of political, philosophical, religious, or poetic thought. The manifestation of the new poetic self inevitably leads to tension and the refusal to acknowledge or adhere to authority and to accepted poetic forms and conventions. This notion of the individual as a marginalised figure in opposition to society or at odds with the dominant ideologies of the time – now a common theme of much fiction – finds its roots here.

Abrams sees this in the Romantic Movement finding inspiration in the French Revolution, with its ‘infinite promise of [...] a great age of new beginnings and high possibilities’.<sup>18</sup> These new possibilities captured the imagination of the Romantics, however, just as Miss Brodie’s fascist sympathies can be understood as symbolic of a wider political manifestation of her ‘crème de la crème’ (*Jean Brodie*, p.8) mantra, the reign of terror in the aftermath of the French Revolution mirrors the reality of bloodshed and violence borne out of fascism and Nazism.

Nevertheless, the potentialities that the French and American Revolutions offered are symptomatic of the Romantic tendency to imagine beyond the present and tangible. While for some this tendency manifested itself in the depiction of the mysterious and the supernatural, for others it is evident in the desire to imagine and enact a world radically different to their own. What both of these manifestations of this tendency have in common is the centrality of the imagination. As a consequence:

Many writers viewed a human being as endowed with limitless aspiration towards the infinite good envisioned by the faculty of imagination [...] Humanity’s unquenchable aspirations beyond its assigned limits, which to the neoclassic moralist had been its tragic error, now became humanity’s glory and a mode of triumph [...] the highest art consists in an endeavour beyond finite human possibility.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Abrams (1995), p.116.

<sup>19</sup> Abrams (1985), pp.116-117.

Abrams outlines the seemingly self-contradictory role that imagination plays in Romanticism. It enables both a retreat inwards towards the self, but it also facilitates an acknowledgement of the possibilities that lie outwith designated boundaries. As Abercrombie's states, 'Relying on inner experience, one may desire to withdraw from the actualities of life; relying on inner experience, one may desire to improve the actualities of life'.<sup>20</sup> This contrary motion of the outward-looking and the inward-looking properties of imagination results in Romanticism's range of styles, forms and subjects, from the self-analysis of Wordsworth's *The Prelude* to the mystical other-worldliness of Coleridge's 'Kubla Khan'. Nevertheless, the attempt to see, understand, and express what lies beyond human understanding is perhaps the grandest of all the disparate elements of what we now classify as Romanticism.

However, not all writers now regarded as Romantic share the characteristics outlined above. Nonetheless, the centrality of the imagination to the majority of Romantic writers is emphasised by many critics. C.M. Bowra says:

If we wish to distinguish a single characteristic which differentiates the English Romantics from the poets of the eighteenth century, it is to be found in the importance they attached to the imagination and in the special view they held of it.<sup>21</sup>

Jonathan Wordsworth cites Byron as the exception, as he mentions imagination only in passing, but by contrast,

His five great contemporaries – Blake, Coleridge, Wordsworth, Shelley, Keats – are preoccupied with imagination. Why they should have this in common is not at all obvious. They didn't know that imagination would come to be thought of as the hallmark of the Romantic poets. And they didn't know they were Romantic poets.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Abercrombie (1963), p.90.

<sup>21</sup> C. M. Bowra, 'The Romantic Imagination', in *The Romantic Imagination: A Casebook*, ed. by John Spencer Hill (London: The Macmillan Press, 1983), pp.87-109 (p.87).

<sup>22</sup> Jonathan Wordsworth, 'The Romantic Imagination', in *A Companion to Romanticism* ed. by Duncan Wu (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers Ltd, 1999), pp.486-494 (p.486).

So imagination, according to Wordsworth (the critic as opposed to the poet), is the hallmark of the Romantics, and John Spencer Hill discusses how the Romantic imagination functions as the central faculty for poetic and artistic expression:

The imagination synthesises disparate elements in order to generate a new reality. It is not, as it was for neoclassical critics, a mechanical power [...] it is rather a vital and organic faculty which permits the mind to see beneath the transitory surface of the material world – to see, that is, into the life of things and to perceive the intimate relationship between the perceiving mind and objects of its contemplation.<sup>23</sup>

It is the imagination that allows the perceiver or poet to see ‘beneath’ or ‘beyond’ the ‘transitory surface of the material world’;<sup>24</sup> where, as Abrams notes, ‘objects are charged with a significance beyond their physical qualities’.<sup>25</sup> Hill also outlines the difference between the neoclassical conception of the imagination as primarily the mechanism of memory, as opposed to the Romantic’s active, creative, seeking understanding. Hill also identifies a common thread in romantic poetry, the unification of opposites. Stephen Prickett also identifies this, stating, ‘The artist is the man of genius, the creator of new wholes, reconciling opposite or discordant qualities’.<sup>26</sup> This identification of the romantic artist as a genius, apart from the rest of society, signals the recurrence of the poet-as-prophet idea.<sup>27</sup> It also emphasises the importance and centrality of imagination in the process. The poet, says Coleridge,

Diffuses a tone and spirit of unity, that blends, and (as it were) fuses, each into each, by that synthetic and magical power to which we have exclusively appropriated the name of the imagination. This power [...] reveals itself in the balance or reconciliation of opposite or discordant qualities.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> John Spencer Hill, ‘Introduction’, in *The Romantic Imagination: A Casebook*, ed. by John Spencer Hill (London: The Macmillan Press, 1983), pp.11-23 (p.13).

<sup>24</sup> Hill (1983), p.13.

<sup>25</sup> Abrams (1985), p.115.

<sup>26</sup> Stephen Prickett, *Romanticism and Religion* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976), p.23.

<sup>27</sup> Prickett (1976), p.23.

<sup>28</sup> Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *Biographia Literaria: edited with his aesthetical essays by J Shawcross*, 2 vols (Oxford: Clarendon, 1907), II, pp. 12-13. Cited in Hill, (1983), p.39.

So the imagination enables the poet to conceive and understand the world as cohesive, despite its confusions and incongruities. The search for some form of unity is one which Spark tackles throughout her fiction. Spark's biographer Martin Stannard also identifies this preoccupation, calling her 'the artist who sought order through imaginative transformation',<sup>29</sup> which, with reference to the Coleridge passage above, places her firmly within the romantic tradition. The presence of these discordant elements is also apparent in *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie*. What is less apparent is whether any unity is achieved, whether Spark or any of the novel's many romantic artists can imagine a cohesive world amidst the fragmentary oppositions of Jean Brodie's Edinburgh.

In 'Muriel Spark's Break with Romanticism', Paddy Lyons cites Alain Badiou as saying that '[the Romantic] artist lifts subjectivity to the heights of the sublime [...] Just as the work is sacred, so too is the artist sublime'.<sup>30</sup> Lyons argues that Spark leaves Romanticism behind, rejecting its focus on the sublimity of the author, which she sees 'as a pitfall to be avoided'.<sup>31</sup> Yet Spark has talked of her experiences in Africa within a specifically romantic rubric:

The experience of the Victoria Falls gave me courage to endure the difficult years to come. The falls became to me a symbol of spiritual strength. I had no settled religion, but I recognized the experience of the falls as spiritual in kind. They are one of those works of nature that cannot be distinguished from a sublime work of art.<sup>32</sup>

The power and majesty of nature are described in symbolic terms, endowed with a spiritual significance – unidentified at this point – beyond its physical presence. Spark's depiction of the scene and its spiritual symbolism are compared to the transfigurational qualities of art. This is Spark outlining a textbook definition of Romanticism, and as the viewer of the scene she finds herself inspired to consider what lies beyond her sensory perception. She describes this in terms of the sublime, a concept that as Lyons has noted, is central to

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<sup>29</sup> Martin Stannard, *Muriel Spark: The Biography* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 2009), p.36.

<sup>30</sup> Lyons (2010), p.86.

<sup>31</sup> Lyons (2010), p.86.

<sup>32</sup> Muriel Spark, *Curriculum Vitae* (London: Penguin, 1992), p.128.

Romanticism. However, rather than reject what Lyons calls ‘the lumber of romanticism’,<sup>33</sup> Spark here is seen to be acknowledging an explicitly Romantic sentiment; that nature invokes a symbolic, spiritual reaction in the onlooker. What remains to be seen is whether this position is rendered in her fiction.

Miss Brodie’s reliance on art as the inspiration for her romantic self-fashioning (and substitute for religion) is present throughout *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie*. A symbolic figure is that of the English Pre-Raphaelite painter and poet, Dante Gabriel Rossetti (1828-1882). He is mentioned only once in the text, a liminal presence throughout, blurred and indistinct in the background as a motif of Miss Brodie’s attempts to re-fashion herself as a Petrarchan courtly love figure and aficionado of Italian art and romantic poetry.

She attempts to portray herself as the courtly love figure by means of an imagistic juxtaposition, placing Rossetti’s painting alongside her meeting with a poet to imply that the moment of sublime love encapsulated in the painting is synonymous with her own experience:

I met a young poet by a fountain. Here is a picture of Dante meeting Beatrice – it is pronounced *Beatrichay* in Italian which makes the name very beautiful – on the Ponte Vecchio. He fell in love with her at that moment. [...] It was a sublime moment in a sublime love. (*Jean Brodie*, p.46)

Unfortunately for Miss Brodie, the painting she describes is neither by Rossetti, nor does it depict the meeting of Dante and Beatrice on the Ponte Vecchio. Rossetti did depict their meeting, in *Beatrice Meeting Dante at a Marriage Feast, Denies him her Salutation* (1851), and in *Dante’s Dream at the time of the Death of Beatrice* (1871), but neither of these occur on the Ponte Vecchio. Miss Brodie is confused, as the painting which portrays the meeting of Dante and Beatrice is by Henry Holiday (1839-1927), entitled *Dante and*

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<sup>33</sup> Lyons (2010), p.97.

*Beatrice* (1884).<sup>34</sup> Holiday's painting is situated at the junction of the Lugarno and the Ponte a Santa Trinità, looking South-East along the River Arno with the Ponte Vecchio as the main feature in the background. This is the only work of the Pre-Raphaelite period that depicts the meeting of Dante and Beatrice with the Ponte Vecchio featuring prominently, and subsequently it can be concluded that this is the painting Miss Brodie refers to.

Holiday was heavily influenced by the Pre-Raphaelite school, and shared with Rossetti a fascination with both Dante, the medieval Italian poet (1265-1321), and Dante's muse Beatrice. Nevertheless, Miss Brodie's belief that the painting is by Rossetti is important. Named after Dante, Rossetti's fascination with his thirteenth-century namesake inspired him to regard his own wife Elizabeth Siddal, and following her death his lover Jane Morris, in a similar way to Dante's Beatrice. Siddal was the model for numerous portrayals of Beatrice, the most famous of which, *Beata Beatrix* (1864-70), may also account for Miss Brodie's confusion.<sup>35</sup> The Ponte Vecchio again appears in the background, albeit as a faint outline, while the figure of Dante stands in the back right looking in the direction of the figure of Love. The painting portrays the idealised Beatrice at a moment of transfiguration, taken from Dante's 'Vita Nuova' (New Life). Spark uses the paintings of Rossetti and Holiday to form an amalgam in Miss Brodie's mind, and this serves two functions. Firstly, it undermines Miss Brodie, especially given her claims that 'pictorial art is my passion' (*Jean Brodie*, p.66), but more importantly it serves to deepen the possible meanings that are implied by the themes and symbols common to these paintings and which recur throughout Spark's novel.

By placing herself alongside Beatrice, Miss Brodie elevates herself to a figure of courtly love, a 'Beatrichay' (*Jean Brodie*, p.46) of her own making. In Holiday's work, this 'sublime moment in a sublime love' (*Jean Brodie*, p.46) is echoed by Miss Brodie

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<sup>34</sup> Henry Holiday, *Dante and Beatrice*, Walker Art Gallery, <<http://www.liverpoolmuseums.org.uk/walker/collections/19c/holiday.aspx>> [accessed 23 February 2011]

<sup>35</sup> Dante Gabriel+ Rossetti, *Beata Beatrix*, Tate Online, <<http://www.tate.org.uk/servlet/ViewWork?workid=12769&tabview=image>> [accessed 23 February 2011]

when she says of her affair with art teacher Teddy Lloyd that '[i]t was a great love' (*Jean Brodie*, p.56). However, just as the conventions of courtly love prescribe that the woman remains unobtainable, Miss Brodie says, 'I renounced the great love of my prime' (*Jean Brodie*, p.56). Not only does she imagine herself as Beatrice, but she re-enacts Beatrice's relationship with Dante and she rejects Lloyd despite his obvious infatuation with her. Just as Dante cannot pursue Beatrice – they were both married to others, and she remained beyond his reach – so too must Miss Brodie remain beyond the grasp of Teddy Lloyd.

It is also possible to see the many parallels between the character Teddy Lloyd and Rossetti, and, despite her often inflated self-regard, Miss Brodie does remain the Beatrice figure to Teddy Lloyd's Rossetti. We are told that 'Teddy Lloyd continued reproducing Jean Brodie in his paintings' (*Jean Brodie*, p.123), and that Sandy 'had told Miss Brodie how peculiarly all his portraits reflected her. She had said so again and again, for Miss Brodie loved to hear it' (*Jean Brodie*, p.120). The parallels are extended when we consider that Rossetti continued to portray Dante's Beatrice, using his next love, Jane Morris, as his model in the later part of his career following the death of his wife. Just as Rossetti is infatuated with Beatrice and cannot keep her out of his pictures, Lloyd cannot keep Miss Brodie out of his, no matter who he is painting.

The parallels between Rossetti and his namesake Dante are also worth noting. Dante's love for Beatrice continued long after her death at age twenty four in June 1290, and she continued to be the inspiration for his poetry until his death. Similarly, Rossetti portrayed his wife Elizabeth Siddal as Beatrice in *Beata Beatrix* which he worked on from 1864 to 1870, following her death in 1862. This layered relationship between Dante, Rossetti and Teddy Lloyd is part of the novel's structural method, where levels of meaning beyond the surface narrative are inferred through allusions to such figures and works of literature and art. Within this layering, Spark has Teddy Lloyd and Miss Brodie recreate the artist, muse, and courtly love elements of the relationship between Rossetti and his wife Elizabeth Siddal (and following her death Jane Morris), itself a visual recreation of the



courtly love, artist and muse relationship between Dante and Beatrice. Art provides the thread that links all these textures together, and they represent a re-telling of history through art, where Spark's characters allude to historical figures, and where factual accuracy is relegated beneath fictional and emotional approximation. The subsequent danger is that imagination comes to supersede truth and that emotion will defeat reason. But Spark does not allow this imaginative re-historicising to play out beyond the parameters of reason and rationality. Indeed the disastrous consequences of an imbalance of either imagination or reason, or any of the related binaries such as art and science, or emotion and rationality, are evident in the downfall of the overly Romantic Miss Brodie. Her romantic fictionalising places her imagination, emotion and self-perception at a greater premium than truth, evident in her version of the meeting with the poet which leads to her mistaken introduction of Rossetti.

This creation of a textural network of cross-references and visual intertextuality is evident in Rossetti's *Beata Beatrix*. In the painting, the figure of Beatrice is portrayed as in a transfigurational trance, but there are numerous reference points to the death of Elizabeth Siddal, Rossetti's wife and model for the painting. Siddal committed suicide by overdosing on laudanum following the birth of their stillborn daughter, and Alicia Craig Faxon states that 'The Dove, which drops a poppy into Beatrice's hands, is red – a messenger of both love and death – and the poppy, symbolic of sleep and death, may also refer to opium, which caused Siddal's death.'<sup>36</sup> This connection between flowers and death is carried through into the novel, with Miss Brodie telling the class that her former fiancé Hugh 'fell on Flanders' Field' (*Jean Brodie*, p.12). As Flanders is an area known for poppy fields, Spark is creating a further level of referential meaning, tying Miss Brodie's experiences to those in Rossetti's painting.

Spark alludes to flowers and fallen leaves imagery throughout the novel. Miss Brodie re-tells her past to the girls beneath the elm tree in the school grounds, saying that

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<sup>36</sup> Alicia Craig Faxon, *Dante Gabriel Rossetti* (Oxford: Phaidon Press, 1989), p.143.

‘He fell like an autumn leaf’ (*Jean Brodie*, p.12), an image that is heightened in the narrative when Miss Brodie says that ‘Hugh was one of the Flowers of the Forest, lying in his grave’ (*Jean Brodie*, p.13). The atmosphere is sympathetic to Miss Brodie’s sentimental recalling of her fiancé’s demise: ‘It was one of the last autumn days when the leaves were falling in little gusts. They fell on the children’ (*Jean Brodie*, p.12). We see Miss Brodie utilising her surroundings to raise the emotional pitch of her story, to create the maximum impact upon her girls. Miss Brodie’s sense of theatre and manipulative sentimentality relies on the combination of her autumnal surroundings and her references to the falling leaves – both literally, as in the surroundings, and metaphorically, in relation to Hugh. In this we see Miss Brodie as the would-be Romantic artist, assuming a role and performing for her girls, and again alluding back to historic artistic precedents. In this way Spark’s novel displays a sense of longing for aspects of Romanticism, yet at the same time this sense of longing is problematised, primarily through the behaviour and character of the overly romantic Miss Brodie. This tension is evident throughout, yet it provides a series of oppositions which provide the novel’s focus and driving force.

Flower associations are predominantly morbid throughout the novel. The reference to the poppy fields of Flanders and the death of Hugh are heightened with the allusion to the 1776 version of the ballad ‘Flowers of the Forest’ by Jean Elliot of Minto (1727-1805), written of the fallen Scots on the field at the Battle of Flodden in 1513. As with the trajectory running from Dante through Rossetti to Teddy Lloyd, Spark articulates a historical context through Miss Brodie to deepen the layers of allusive and implied possible meanings. Miss Brodie talks of wearing a dress of poppies on her visit to A. A. Milne’s house in London, inserting herself into the theme of poppy imagery running through Rossetti, Hugh and herself. The great hall of the Marcia Blaine School for Girls features a ‘manly portrait’ (*Jean Brodie*, p.6) of its eponymous namesake, under which ‘a bunch of hard-wearing flowers’ (*Jean Brodie*, p.6) are placed every Founder’s Day. When Eunice reminisces about her former teacher, she tells her husband that she ‘must take

flowers to her grave' (*Jean Brodie*, p.27), and when Miss Brodie recites Robert Burns, she chooses a passage that reflects this motif of loss and decomposition: 'Come autumn sae pensive, in yellow and grey, / And soothe me wi' tidings o' nature's decay' (*Jean Brodie*, p.47).

Poppies and flowers in general function as a motif where death, loss, and decay are signified, but they also serve to alert the reader to the Romantic self-fashionings of Miss Brodie. As noted above, it is also possible to see the poppy reference extended to imply a sense of the opium trance common in the Romantic era. Indeed, Miss Brodie's consistent and inaccurate re-imaginings and re-tellings have about them a sense of the opium induced reverie. It is as though in re-telling her experiences, she is unable to rely on fact and unconsciously embellishes her tales as though she is somewhat removed from the memory of the events she depicts. She spends the novel blissfully misreading the aspects of the girls' personalities for which they are famous, and imagining her own life as a recreation of that of Beatrice in thirteenth-century Florence. In doing so she manifests the dangers of an overly active Romantic imagination which detaches from reality in such a way as to superimpose meaning where there is none, and to create identities at odds with reality.

Miss Brodie's love of art provides further evidence of her casual approach to factual accuracy in her teaching, and the example of this again shows Spark tying together the layers of allusions and meaning which lie beneath the surface of *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie*. Miss Brodie says that her friends 'took me to visit A.A. Milne. In the hall was hung a reproduction of Botticelli's *Primavera* which means the Birth of Spring' (*Jean Brodie*, p.44). As with her confusion surrounding Rossetti and Holiday, Miss Brodie mistakenly amalgamates two paintings; the titles of Botticelli's *Primavera* (c. 1482), which translates as 'spring', and *The Birth of Venus* (c. 1486) are merged to become the *Birth of Spring*. But there is more here than just Miss Brodie misidentifying her favourite works of art. Spark has again chosen these paintings for their allusive properties and thematic commonalities with her novel. Flowers and foliage are central in both of Botticelli's

paintings. The *Primavera* depicts the garden of Venus at the onset of spring. To the right of Venus stands the figure of Flora, scattering flowers on the ground, wearing a dress embroidered with various species of flowers, including the poppies that adorn Miss Brodie's dress in her re-telling of the story. The scattering of the flowers invokes the 'Flowers of the Forest' connection, returning us to Miss Brodie's dead fiancé Hugh, while the floral dress is evidence that Miss Brodie seems to be merging her memory of what she herself was wearing, 'I wore my silk dress with the large red poppies' (*Jean Brodie*, p.44), with that of Botticelli's painting.

*The Birth of Venus* shows the goddess of love alighting on the shore, accompanied by two zephyrs and one nymph, also in a floral patterned dress, who is holding 'a pinkish-red cloak, ready to place it round the shoulders of Venus. It is embroidered with blue cornflowers, white and red double daisies, and a yellow flower, and is fringed with gold'.<sup>37</sup> The two zephyrs are surrounded by flowers which are falling to the shore. Here again we see that in erroneously identifying the paintings of Botticelli, Miss Brodie alerts the reader to the thematic patterning and the layered motifs that Spark uses to create depth and a scheme of intertextual allusion.

These layers of interpretive possibility extend further. L. D. and Helen S. Ettlinger note that 'Botticelli illustrated a manuscript of Dante's *Divina Commedia* for Lorenzo di Pierfranco de' Medici'.<sup>38</sup> There is also the interpretation of the *Primavera* where the figure of Venus is analogous to Beatrice, as cantos 28-31 of the 'Purgatory' section of the *Divine Comedy* have Dante meeting Beatrice in the Garden of Eden.<sup>39</sup> What are important are not the numerous interpretive possibilities of Botticelli's paintings, but the broad themes which add additional layers of possibility, meaning, and allusion to Miss Brodie's erroneous referrals. For example, it is worth noting that Rossetti was heavily influenced by Botticelli,

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<sup>37</sup> Ronald Lightbown, *Sandro Botticelli: Volume 1 Life and Work* (London: Paul Elek, 1978), p.87.

<sup>38</sup> L. D. and Helen S. Ettlinger, *Botticelli* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1976), p.178.

<sup>39</sup> Roberto Marini, 'Analisi de un Capolavoro Botticelli 'La Primavera'', [www.thais.it](http://www.thais.it). <<http://www.thais.it/speciali/Primavera/analisi/analisi2.htm>> [Accessed 23 February 2011] (citations no. 20 and 21).

and depicted Botticelli's *Venus* in works such as *Astarte Syriaca* and *Venus Verticordia*.<sup>40</sup> As Faxon states, this relationship was noted at the time, as 'Two collectors, Leyland and Graham (the two who owned the greatest number of Rossetti's paintings), displayed his work alongside that of renaissance painters. Graham favoured a juxtaposition with Botticelli, whose work he felt Rossetti's resembled'.<sup>41</sup> Spark's choice of paintings therefore creates a closely inter-related texture of allusions which give the characters of Teddy Lloyd and Miss Brodie a full and three-dimensional presence, while simultaneously revealing a thematic depth beyond (and in addition to) the textual surface of the novel. By embedding Lloyd and Brodie into the tradition of Dante, Botticelli, Rossetti and Beatrice, Spark appears to Romanticise her characters. Yet this actually serves to undermine both, as their behaviour, especially their affair, seems tawdry in comparison to the grand Romantic themes and gestures embodied in the work of the artists mentioned. Here again we see Spark motioning towards the Romantic, with Lloyd embodying the Romantic artist and Brodie the Romantic imagination. Yet the commonplace of their existence belies their attempts at sublimity, and alerts the reader to the dangers of Romanticism which has become untethered from reason and rationality.

The inaccuracies in Miss Brodie's teaching are consonant with her imaginative and creative use of the facts in her own life. She tells the girls that Hugh, her fallen fiancé, was 'from Ayrshire, a countryman, but a hard-working and clever scholar' (*Jean Brodie*, p.12), implying a distinct resemblance to Robert Burns. However, Hugh seems to appropriate characteristics from other men in Miss Brodie's life each time she refers to him:

Miss Brodie's old love story was newly embroidered, under the elm, with curious threads [...] 'Sometimes Hugh would sing, he had a rich tenor voice. At other times he fell silent and would set up his easel and paint. He was very talented at both arts, but I think the painter was the real Hugh'. (*Jean Brodie*, pp.71-72)

Miss Brodie amalgamates elements of all her lovers to construct the Romantic, artistic ideal of Hugh, who now combines Teddy Lloyd's painting skills and Gordon Lowther's voice. But the girls see through this, through her retrospective historicising and her inventive re-imagining of the past:

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<sup>40</sup> Reed Keefe, 'The Averted Gaze: Venus in Edward Burne-Jones' Works', *The Victorian Web*, 17 May 2007 <<http://www.victorianweb.org/painting/bj/paintings/keefe12.html>> [accessed 23 February 2011], (para. 1 of 21).

<sup>41</sup> Faxon (1989), p.169.

This was the first time the girls had heard of Hugh's artistic leanings. Sandy puzzled over this and took counsel with Jenny, and it came to them both that Miss Brodie was making her new love story fit the old. Thereafter the two girls listened with double ears, and the rest of the class with single. (*Jean Brodie*, pp.71-72)

Throughout the novel Sandy and Jenny are differentiated from the rest of the class through their own imagination and writing. Their fictional letters between Miss Brodie and her lovers, and their Mountain Eyrie story show them to be the two who are most similar to their teacher in imaginative and fictionalising terms. Sandy in particular recognises Miss Brodie's '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' (*Jean Brodie*, p.72). Miss Brodie's blurring of fact and fiction in art history and her own history is unwittingly revealed by the girls under questioning from the head teacher Miss Mackay:

'Does Miss Brodie tell you stories?'

'Yes,' said Mary.

'What about?'

'History,' said Jenny and Sandy together, because it was a question they had foreseen might arise one day and they had prepared the answer with a brainracking care for literal truth'. (*Jean Brodie*, p.65)

The girl's identification of Miss Brodie's fictionalisation of historical fact – with the added irony of their own answer being the 'literal truth' that innocently reveals Miss Brodie's fictionalising tendencies – relates to both her private and her teaching life. Indeed, the double ears that the girls require equate to the double eyes that the reader requires throughout the novel.

For Miss Brodie, there is no distinction between the way she amalgamates the identities of Hugh Carruthers, Teddy Lloyd and Gordon Lowther, and the way in which she mistakenly merges the two Botticelli's and the Rossetti and Holiday, or the way she sees her life as a recreation of these paintings. These occur for the same reasons, that she employs a process of imaginative aesthetic elevation, a 'method of making patterns with

facts' (*Jean Brodie*, p.72) in order to transfigure her commonplace, to recreate herself as the courtly lover and muse that she perceives herself to be.

This process of imaginative aesthetic elevation is clear from the original mistaken reference to the Rossetti painting. Miss Brodie elevates herself to a Beatrice figure, but she is not the only one affected by this imaginative transfigurational process. Having previously identified Eunice as 'Ariel' (*Jean Brodie*, p.26), the spirit of Shakespeare's *The Tempest*, on account of her cartwheels and capers, Miss Brodie elevates Rose to the status of Venus; hence Spark's choice of Botticelli's *Primavera* and *The Birth of Venus* as referents. Rose, we are told,

was to provoke Miss Brodie's amazement and then her awe and finally her abounding enthusiasm for the role Rose then appeared to be enacting: that of a great lover, magnificently elevated above the ordinary run of lovers, above the moral laws, Venus incarnate, something set apart. (*Jean Brodie*, p.38)

What is crucial is the way in which Miss Brodie elevates herself and those whom she elects, to an artistic and aesthetic level where they are 'above the moral laws' (*Jean Brodie*, p.38). Botticelli's Venus is chosen as Rose's mythical and aesthetic 'other', because for the contemporary viewer *The Birth of Venus* affords the opportunity to come to a better understanding of the spiritual through the observation of the physical. This is outlined by the Ettlingers, who state that

*The Birth of Venus* may also be seen as an expression of Neo-Platonic convictions [...] to anyone familiar with the works of Plato, Venus could personify beauty, and beauty was identical with truth. Looked at this way, the *Birth of Venus* could become a philosophical and moral allegory.<sup>42</sup>

This Neo-Platonic reading corresponds exactly with the process of transfiguration that the romantic imagination enacts throughout the novel in the contemplation of art; 'It lifts one up' (*Jean Brodie*, p.7), says Miss Brodie to her girls. The Ettlinger explanation also echoes Miss Brodie's own teaching methods, where 'the girls were set to study the Gospels with

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<sup>42</sup> Ettlinger (1976), p.136.

diligence for their truth and goodness, and to read them aloud for their beauty' (*Jean Brodie*, p.36). Here Miss Brodie's own version of the divine substitutes the aesthetic for the spiritual, and the mode of elevating one's consciousness to a higher or sublime level via a process of aesthetic and imaginative elevation corresponds with the Neo-Platonic reading of Botticelli's work as outlined by the Ettlengers. The experience of viewing Venus would transfigure the onlooker, reminiscent of the Romantic poet who experiences a physical response to an external stimulus, then considers the internal, emotional reaction that this response generates. The transfigurational abilities of art are so powerful for Miss Brodie that they render moral concerns negligible. This extends to those of an artistic persuasion, with Miss Brodie exhibiting a leniency with regards to the tortured Romantic artist. Of the great Pavlova Miss Brodie says: 'She screams at the chorus [...] which is permissible in a great artist' (*Jean Brodie*, pp.62-63), and when Teddy Lloyd smashes a saucer to the floor because he cannot control the girls, Miss Brodie absolves him, stating, 'He has the artistic temperament, of course' (*Jean Brodie*, p.80). Ironically, these transfigurational aspects of art are beyond the girls at this point, as their giggling reaction to Teddy Lloyd's pointer work with the *Primavera* attests (*Jean Brodie*, pp.48-49).

It is clear that Miss Brodie sees herself as part of this community of artists, but there is an important distinction to be made. As the self-fashioned figure of Beatrice, Miss Brodie elevates herself to that of the courtly love figure, a great lover above the moral laws that apply to everyone else. She sees herself as part of the community of artists she so admires, saying of her unrequited affair with Teddy Lloyd, 'We had everything in common, the artistic nature' (*Jean Brodie*, p.56). Yet the girls again unwittingly describe an important distinction between them when Rose says that 'Mr Lloyd is an artist and Miss Brodie is artistic too' (*Jean Brodie*, p.52). In this subtle distinction, we see Spark highlighting the difference between Miss Brodie and Teddy Lloyd, Anna Pavlova, Rossetti, Botticelli, Giotto, and all the artists she admires. She is artistic, but she is not an artist. This is why she is creative with her own history; she reinvents herself as a muse as



she is capable only of being the inspiration for others, she does not have the ability to create art, to create something original, so she applies narrative creativity and compositional skills to the experiences and characters in her own life to render them and her own life as a living work of art.

The initial result of this imaginative aestheticising, or transfiguring of her commonplace, is the elevation of the characters to that of either romantic artists or subjects worthy of art: Rose as Venus, Miss Brodie as Beatrice, Eunice as Ariel. But this process also has actual repercussions. The narrator tells us that ‘All the time they were under her influence she and her actions were outside the context of right and wrong’ (*Jean Brodie*, p.85-86). We hear of ‘Miss Brodie’s excessive lack of guilt’ (*Jean Brodie*, p.85), where ‘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’ (*Jean Brodie*, p.85). It is at this point the reader realises that this practice of aesthetic elevation has crossed the line from being the process whereby Miss Brodie transfigures her life into one worthy of the attention of Rossetti or Botticelli, into the Calvinistic realm of a self-fashioned elect, where her actions are ‘outside the context of right and wrong’ (*Jean Brodie*, pp.85-86). This Calvinistic self-absolution occurs at the meeting point of aestheticism and religion, and its effects are noted, with Sandy stating that ‘Miss Brodie’s defective sense of self-criticism had not been without its beneficent and enlarging effects’ (*Jean Brodie*, p.86). The girl’s cruel treatment of Mary Macgregor illustrates that for all that they are defined as a group, the ‘general absolution’ (*Jean Brodie*, p.85) engendered by Miss Brodie allows each of the girls to abdicate moral responsibility regarding Mary, and in the novel’s most notable example of ironic reversal, for Sandy when she betrays Miss Brodie.

Miss Brodie’s Romantic transfigurational tendencies and moral re-contextualisation, previously abstractions, now spread to the set, influencing their lives in real ways. Sandy recognises the danger Miss Brodie represents, and she ‘perceived that the woman was obsessed by the need for Rose to sleep with the man she herself was in love

with' (*Jean Brodie*, p.119). This is no longer the Jean Brodie of their early school days, telling (hi)stories and creating inaccurate, but nonetheless harmless, identities and personas for which the girls are famous. For this Miss Brodie, her persona as the courtly lover Beatrice to Teddy Lloyd's Dante/Rossetti is now a reality: "I am his Muse", said Miss Brodie. "But I have renounced his love in order to dedicate my prime to the young girls in my care. I am his Muse but Rose shall take my place" (*Jean Brodie*, p.120). It is now that Sandy realises; "She thinks she is Providence [...] she thinks she is the God of Calvin, she sees the beginning and the end" (*Jean Brodie*, p.120). This is the point where Sandy sees Miss Brodie's imaginative, aesthetic, and Calvinistic tendencies coalesce. The danger of Miss Brodie is now clear; she is intent on having Rose become Teddy Lloyd's lover. But it is Sandy who fulfils this role while Rose merely poses for him, and Miss Brodie remains his muse, his *Beata Beatrix*, constant in all of his work no matter who he is painting.

Miss Brodie's Romantic imagination and love of pictorial art have some correspondence with her tendencies to manipulate and predetermine the lives of the girls. Her attempts to mould the set, and herself, into characters from great artworks, parallel her rigid, predetermined religious outlook in that the paintings are fixed; their characters are caught in moments which are eternal and unchanging. As Faxon notes, *Beata Beatrix* 'marks the beginning of Rossetti's attempts to portray a moment, both temporal and eternal, when flesh and spirit are wed'.<sup>43</sup> Sandy acts to undermine Miss Brodie's attempts at predeterminism, reclaiming her life from Miss Brodie's efforts to emulate a Romantic artist and fix Rose's role as Lloyd's lover. Sandy undermines Teddy Lloyd with her rational, psychological investigation into the inner psyche of the Romantic artist, while she subverts Miss Brodie's role as his muse by rejecting the self-aggrandising and egotistic results of her unfettered Romantic imagination. For Sandy, Teddy Lloyd is no Rossetti, and Miss Brodie is no Beatrice, rather, they are examples of inflated egotism and unchecked

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<sup>43</sup> Faxon (1989), p.144.

Romanticism, and the dangers they embody provide the catalyst for her conversion to Catholicism and her betrayal of Miss Brodie.

It is Rossetti's own explanation of his *Beata Beatrix* that provides a direct connection to Spark and *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie*. In a letter to his friend William Graham in March 1873, Rossetti states that 'The picture must of course be viewed not as a representation of the incident of the death of Beatrice, but as an ideal of the subject, symbolized by a trance or sudden spiritual transfiguration'.<sup>44</sup> This foreshadows the link between Sandy's 'Transfiguration of the Commonplace' (*Jean Brodie*, p.35) treatise, and Miss Brodie transfiguring herself into the idealised subject of the male gaze and heart, Dante's (and Rossetti's) muse, Beatrice. The transfigurational aspect of (re)creating or (re)telling one's history to suit one's present, or the raising of mundane experiences to sacramental heights through the appreciation of art, or an understanding of the divine, is the common thread linking Dante, Botticelli, Rossetti, Teddy Lloyd, Jean Brodie and Sandy Stranger. With regards to Miss Brodie, there is a direct parallel in the way she amalgamates the identities of Hugh Carruthers, Teddy Lloyd and Gordon Lowther, and the way in which she mistakenly merges the two Botticelli's and the Rossetti and Holiday paintings. Spark is alerting the reader that Miss Brodie's inaccurate and mistaken mergings are symptomatic of her attempts to Romanticise, to fictionalise, and to aesthetically elevate her everyday existence to that of a work of art.

However, there is an important distinction between Jean Brodie's secular and Sandy's spiritual modes of transfiguration. For Miss Brodie, the transformative and transfigurational properties of the arts are the focus of her educational manifesto. She attempts to elevate the common educational experience of the girls by raising their minds through art, poetry, language, dance and music. This is part of a pattern of Romantic aestheticising where the properties of art cause one's consciousness to elevate everyday

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<sup>44</sup> Dante Gabriel Rossetti, in William E. Fredeman ed., *The Correspondence of Dante Gabriel Rossetti: The Last Decade, 1873-1874, Kelmscott to Birchington, Volume VI* (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2006), pp.88-89.

surroundings. It is undermined by Miss Brodie's creative fictionalising and erroneous teaching, and the implication is clear; one can appreciate art, but only the belief in God can provide a truly transfigurational experience, hence the title of Sandy's theological treatise.

## Chapter 2 – Resolving Enlightenment and Romantic Binaries: *Frankenstein*, *Child Of Light*, and the Ideal of the Eighteenth–Century Genius

Spark's 1951 study of Mary Shelley, *Child of Light*, opens with an overview of the mood around the time of Mary's birth (1797). Spark states:

We are hardly impressed with a sense of love and light when we look back now on that period of transition between the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries [...] Reason had not yet given way to feeling as the cult of the elect. (*Child of Light*, p.9)

By the time Mary's *Frankenstein or, The Modern Prometheus* was published in 1818, the cultural, philosophic, and intellectual evolution from reason to feeling was an ongoing process, but one which, alongside other related and parallel concerns, provided the creative material and subject matter for Mary's novel. Spark identifies this as a tense and dark period of transition which lies at the heart of the progression from the Enlightenment to the Romantic era.

Before considering the landscape at the time Shelley was writing *Frankenstein*, it is worth considering briefly the main concerns of the Enlightenment, as outlined by Peter Kitson:

The writers and thinkers of the Enlightenment imagined themselves as emerging from centuries of darkness and ignorance into a new age enlightened by reason, science and a respect for humanity [...] More than a set of shared beliefs or dogma, the Enlightenment stood for an attitude and a sceptical method of thought [...] All received ideas and opinions were to be subject to the light of 'reason'.<sup>1</sup>

This emphasis on reason is in contrast to the stress placed on feeling by the Romantics who followed, and as Kitson observes, the Enlightenment rationality is manifested more as an attitude than as any standard or doctrine. The move away from reason to an emphasis on feeling is also stressed by Louis Cazamian, who states that

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<sup>1</sup> Peter J. Kitson, 'Beyond the Enlightenment: The Philosophical, Scientific and Religious Inheritance', in *A Companion to Romanticism*, ed. by Duncan Wu (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers Ltd, 1999), pp.35-47 (p.35).

[t]he Romantic spirit can be defined as an accentuated predominance of emotional life, provoked or directed by the exercise of imaginative vision, and in its turn stimulating or directing such exercise. Intense emotion coupled with an intense display of imagery, such is the frame of mind which supports and feeds the new literature.<sup>2</sup>

Cazamian outlines the major features of the Romantics as the expression of emotion, the centrality of the romantic imagination or vision, and the reliance on powerful imagery. These are in contrast to the decorum and restrained modes of the previous period. Indeed the contrasting attitudes of the two eras are often expressed critically in binary terms, with the Romantic ideas in stark contrast to those of the Enlightenment. Kitson outlines a number of these oppositions, stating that:

Simply put, such a contrast might be expressed in terms of binary oppositions, such as reason versus emotion; objectivity versus subjectivity; spontaneity versus control; limitation versus aspiration; empiricism versus transcendentalism; society versus the individual; public versus private; order versus rebellion; the cosmopolitan versus the national, and so on.<sup>3</sup>

The binaries Kitson outlines help to identify and understand the philosophical, political and literary concerns at the confluence of the two eras. However, Kitson also realises that this way of understanding the collision of the two periods as a time of oppositions is not universally accepted. He says that recent criticism

has tended to problematise this opposition, arguing that there is not so clean a break between the ideas of the eighteenth century and those of the Age of Romanticism as might at first be apparent.<sup>4</sup>

This is the position of Aidan Day, who says:

We hear that Romanticism was a reaction against Enlightenment perspectives and Neoclassical aesthetics and at the same time that it was inspired by the French

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<sup>2</sup> Emile Legouis and Louis Cazamian, *A History of English Literature* (London: J. M. Dent and Sons Ltd, 1971), p.997. First published in one volume in 1930.

<sup>3</sup> Kitson (1999), p.35.

<sup>4</sup> Kitson (1999), p.35.

Revolution. But the French Revolution was in part a direct expression of the French Enlightenment.<sup>5</sup>

The idea that we can understand the period by utilising a clearly defined series of oppositions that signpost the contrasting philosophies of the two eras is somewhat destabilised, raising questions as to how the current reader is to understand the contexts in which Mary Shelley was working. Nonetheless, as is evident in her words at the outset of this chapter, Spark reads the transition between the Enlightenment and Romantic periods in terms of well-defined binaries. Spark's position is closer to that of Kitson, who argues that Romantic writers were fully aware of the turbulent and transitional literary and philosophical landscape, and consequently their writing reflects a reaction that engages with, while often countering, the ideas of the previous epoch. He states that:

The canonical Romantic poets were both building upon and reacting against the thought of their predecessors, sometimes breaking with the major trends (as in the case of Coleridge's rejection of Enlightenment empiricism) or alternatively pushing that body of thought into more extreme positions than were usual in the Enlightenment.<sup>6</sup>

So it is possible to see Shelley as writing *Frankenstein* in a climate of change, where the intellectual backdrop to her novel is understood as a period of transition from, and reaction to, the Enlightenment, but not a wholesale rejection of all its ideas. This balancing of the concerns of the recent past and present is what gives *Frankenstein* much of its power. Spark's criticism of the novel tends toward a reading that explains and investigates the battling concerns in terms of imbalance, where the presence of reason without emotion, science without religion, the individual without concern for society, or vice-versa, is what creates the novel's destructive power. It is worth noting that Spark's reading of *Frankenstein* – the attempt to resolve the binaries mentioned – accords with a Romantic sensibility, where new wholes are created from resolving these oppositions.

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<sup>5</sup> Aidan Day, *Romanticism* (London: Routledge, 1996), p.6.

<sup>6</sup> Kitson (1999), p.35.

In his monograph on Spark, Alan Massie articulates a common position with regard to the worth of Spark's critical work, and *Child of Light* in particular. He classifies it as a biography, before going on to say that 'though her life of Mary Shelley is full of interesting reflections, it is essentially a conventional work of its period'.<sup>7</sup> Massie does not elaborate as to what these 'interesting reflections' might be; presumably they are too conventional to illicit comment. Peter Kemp makes no mention of *Child of Light* in his 1974 study, despite identifying the Gothic nature of Spark's *Not to Disturb* (1971). He notes that the action takes place in a 'big house outside Geneva',<sup>8</sup> which, given both Mary and Percy Shelley's words in the Preface to *Frankenstein*, constitutes a marked oversight: 'This story was begun in the majestic region where the scene is principally laid, and in society which cannot cease to be regretted. I passed the summer of 1816 in the environs of Geneva'.<sup>9</sup> Mary also chronicles this in her introduction to the 1831 edition, stating

In the summer of 1816, we visited Switzerland, and became the neighbours of Lord Byron. At first we spent our pleasant hours on the lake, or wandering on its shores [...] But it proved a wet, ungenial summer, and incessant rain often confined us for days to the house. (*Frankenstein*, p.6)

It seems surprising that despite the remarkable coincidences that link the two books, no reference is made by Kemp to either *Frankenstein* or *Child of Light*. Yet the setting in Geneva, the Gothic tone, and the confinement to the house in inclement weather that Mary describes, are the hallmarks of the inception of *Frankenstein* and its influence on Spark's *Not to Disturb*. That Spark had written a critical study of Mary seems of no importance to Kemp, and what are obvious intertextual reference points remain unexamined.

Francis Russell Hart's *The Scottish Novel: A Critical Survey* (1978) makes passing reference to Spark's 'literary biographies or editions of Wordsworth, Mary Shelley, Emily

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<sup>7</sup> Massie (1979), p.13.

<sup>8</sup> Peter Kemp, *Muriel Spark* (London: Elek Books Limited, 1974), p.132.

<sup>9</sup> Mary Shelley, *Frankenstein, Or The Modern Prometheus* (London: Penguin, 1994), p.12. First published 1818. Subsequent references will be incorporated within the text, and abbreviated to '*Frankenstein*'.



Bronte, J. H. Newman, and John Masefield'.<sup>10</sup> Here again there is no mention of the critical content, or of how Spark's analysis of *Frankenstein* may illuminate her own work. Hart is consistent with Kemp and Massie in that they see Spark's critical work primarily in terms of its biographic, not critical content.

In *Critical Essays on Muriel Spark* (1992), edited by Joseph Hynes, Warner Berthoff states that Spark's 'interest in Masefield is worth prospecting; so, too, is her interest in Mary Shelley, on whom she published a critical study',<sup>11</sup> but there is no critical exegesis. In the same collection, Alan Bold quotes from *Child of Light*, where Spark claims that Mary's time in Scotland was 'a period of creative gestation; the comparative vastness of the hills and wooded landscapes evoked a latent response to actuality'.<sup>12</sup> Yet despite highlighting this passage and its description of the young Mary in explicitly Romantic terms, Bold makes no critical connection between Spark and Shelley.

Ruth Whittaker's *The Faith and Fiction of Muriel Spark* (1982) is the first notable exception to the above. Whittaker also considers the biographic content of Spark's study, but her reading of *Child of Light* acknowledges previously overlooked connections and commonalities which link Spark and Shelley. She sees similarities in Mary Shelley's intellectual and passionless upbringing with the religious and moral severity of Spark's Edinburgh. She says of *Child of Light*:

It is a particularly interesting book since there are analogies between the lives of the two women [...] we can find in Mrs Spark's understanding of Mary Shelley's nature, clues to our understanding of Muriel Spark. She writes of Mary, 'She was one in whom passion was very strongly restrained, due largely to the inhibiting effect of her early life in an "enlightened" and bleakly rationalistic atmosphere.' Of her own childhood Muriel Spark has said, 'It is impossible to know how much one gets from one's early environment by way of a distinctive character, or whether for

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<sup>10</sup> Hart (1978), p.294.

<sup>11</sup> Warner Berthoff, 'Fortunes of the Novel: Muriel Spark and Iris Murdoch', in *Critical Essays on Muriel Spark*, ed. by Joseph Hynes (New York: G. K. Hall, 1992), pp.55-64 (p.64). Excerpted and reprinted from the *Massachusetts Review*, 8 (1967), pp.301-314.

<sup>12</sup> Alan Bold, 'Poet and Dreamer', in *Critical Essays on Muriel Spark*, ed. by Joseph Hynes (New York: G. K. Hall & Co., 1992), pp.85-103 (p.97).

better or worse. I think the puritanical strain of the Edinburgh ethos is inescapable, but this is not necessarily a bad thing'.<sup>13</sup>

This passage illuminates biographical parallels, but Whittaker's main focus is on the way in which both writer's upbringing gave them 'something to react against' (*Jean Brodie*, p.35), whilst foregrounding how the rational and Enlightenment are placed in opposition to the emotional and the Romantic for both women.

Reacting against the inhibitive religious and moral culture of Edinburgh is a theme throughout *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie*, most notably when Sandy expresses this desire for something to reject, something that exists only as an absence until she awakens to the presence of Calvinism in Edinburgh in general and Miss Brodie in particular. When Sandy comes to identify what she has been looking for, she senses its all-encompassing, unspoken presence in the city and the people, where 'It pervaded the place in proportion as it was unacknowledged' (*Jean Brodie*, p.108). This is the puritanical strain that Spark identifies as 'inescapable', and Sandy finds it in her teacher's desire to have Rose become Teddy Lloyd's lover, and in 'the excesses of Miss Brodie in her prime' (*Jean Brodie*, p.109). Sandy's betrayal of Miss Brodie can be understood as the transition from void to presence; from a lack of something to reject, to a realisation of its abstract presence – the ethos of Calvinism – and its concrete reality in the likes of Miss Brodie, Miss Gaunt and the Kerr sisters, all 'with predestination in their smiles' (*Jean Brodie*, p.75).

Calvinism functions for Sandy in the same fashion that the puritanical functions for Spark in the above quote; it is 'inescapable, but this is not necessarily a bad thing'.<sup>14</sup> It also reflects the way in which the enlightenment and the rational ethos function for Mary Shelley; they are something out of which one grows, a part of one's upbringing and environment, but also something to be discarded. Yet in the cases of Sandy, Victor's

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<sup>13</sup> Ruth Whittaker, *The Faith and Fiction of Muriel Spark* (London: Macmillan, 1982), pp.23-24. Whittaker quotes Spark from *Child Of Light* (1951), p.3, and from Muriel Spark, 'What Images Return', in *Memoirs of a Modern Scotland*, ed. by Karl Miller (London: Faber & Faber, 1970), pp.151-153 (pp.152-153).

<sup>14</sup> Spark, 'What Images Return', p.153, in Whittaker, (1982), p.24.

Monster and Mary, this rejection is never quite complete. We can see this clearly in Sandy's case when she is visited in the convent:

‘The influences of one's teens are very important,’ said the man.  
 ‘Oh yes,’ said Sandy, ‘even if they provide something to react against.’  
 ‘What was your biggest influence, then, Sister Helena? Was it political, personal?  
 Was it Calvinism?’  
 ‘Oh no,’ said Sandy. ‘But there was a Miss Jean Brodie in her prime’.  
(*Jean Brodie*, pp. 34-35)

The added irony of this is that the reader will reach the end of the book knowing that the narrative has undermined Sandy, revealing that ‘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’ (*Jean Brodie*, p.108). Yet it is testament to the power of Miss Brodie that she simultaneously embodies Calvinism even while she overshadows it as the biggest influence in Sister Helena's teens.

Whittaker goes on to argue that Spark, like Mary and Sandy, never quite escapes the influence of her formative years:

Muriel Spark's childhood and that of Godwin's daughter were no doubt very different, but the effects on their writing are similar. Mrs Spark points out that Mary was not able to reconcile the conflict in herself between the woman and the writer.<sup>15</sup>

This passage draws attention to the act of reconciliation, another theme common to both *Frankenstein* and *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie*. Both novels ask how the emotional and the rational are to be reconciled, and what happens when either of these modes of thought overpowers the other. Whittaker states that Mary's shortcomings are echoed in Spark's writing, and that this centres on the conflict of intellect and instinct. Whittaker quotes the following passage from Spark's *Child Of Light*:

I believe the full play of instinct on her imagination to have been foredoomed. The passions she portrays most successfully in her novels are passions of the intellect.

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<sup>15</sup> Whittaker (1982), p.24.

Where affairs of love are intended we find affairs of sentiment, and the closer we look at her individuals the further do they recede imperturbable, into prototypes.  
(*Child Of Light*, p.193)

Spark here identifies the quandary at the core of *Frankenstein* – the conflict of intellect and instinct and the place of the romantic imagination – and Whittaker goes on to emphasise the centrality of these tensions between the enlightenment and romantic worldviews. But perhaps the most important aspect that Whittaker draws our attention to is the closing part of the following statement: ‘As I have indicated, I believe that Muriel Spark, too, has difficulty in conveying “affairs of love”, in allowing her instinct to influence her imagination without fear of a disorderly takeover’.<sup>16</sup> This disorderly takeover is what Spark rails against. Her work is the definition of the tightly controlled, the restrained, the compressed. It is exactly the inability to reconcile these conflicts (between science and religion, reason and emotion, intellect and instinct, the self and the community) that Spark identifies as the reason for the widespread destruction of life and happiness in *Frankenstein*.

However, recent criticism has begun to take notice of *Child of Light*, and to recognise its value as a critical work on *Frankenstein* and Mary, and as an aid to understanding Spark’s writing. A useful insight into Spark and her relationship with Shelley and *Frankenstein* is – ironically, given the repeated dismissive categorisation of *Child of Light* as biography – Martin Stannard’s 2009 biography of Spark. Stannard says ‘*Child of Light* is a remarkable book – the first serious attempt to reclaim Mary Shelley’s writings and influence from her more famous husband’s shadow’.<sup>17</sup> He also identifies how Mary Shelley influenced Spark beyond just the content of her writing, noting that Shelley ‘[s]omehow provided a style of existence for the female artist against which Muriel might define herself’.<sup>18</sup> He goes on to state that

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<sup>16</sup> Whittaker (1982), pp.23-24.

<sup>17</sup> Martin Stannard, *Muriel Spark: The Biography* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 2009), p.115.

<sup>18</sup> Stannard (2009), p.116.

The book's general line of defence is to rebut the then dismissive characterisation of Mary as a dull and depressive companion for [P. B.] Shelley. Muriel cleans off this sludge of sexist varnish and restores a portrait of a woman of intellect.<sup>19</sup>

Stannard highlights Spark's refusal to accept the received male critical notions that surround Mary, and her assumed role as the lesser part of the Shelleys' marriage. He then identifies the main thread of Spark's study, reaching this via an understanding of how both Percy and Mary attempted to fuse the creative with the real. He says that '[g]reat lovers like Mary and Shelley are seen to create for each other the means of integration with the material world and to support each other's vocation'.<sup>20</sup> For Spark, the integration of the artist and the world remains outwith the reach of Mary Wollstonecraft - Mary's mother - in her artistic and emotional life, a struggle that underpins Mary's *Frankenstein*, and which can be seen running through *Jekyll and Hyde* and into Spark's novel. According to Stannard, Spark sees this struggle for coherence as the inception of the central struggle in *Frankenstein*, that of reason versus passion:

Mary Wollstonecraft in Muriel's story never achieves this coherence, either with Godwin or through her work. Both parents are characterised as chilly rationalists, 'drained of passion'. Their daughter's masterpiece, *Frankenstein, or the Modern Prometheus* (1818), is represented as an analogue of this dichotomy between reason and passion, another version of that mid-twentieth-century impasse tangling Muriel's mind – classical or neo-classical versus Neo-Romantic or surrealist'.<sup>21</sup>

What is crucial here is not only that Stannard focuses on the central tension that drives *Frankenstein*, but that he acknowledges that Spark was struggling with a worldview that reflected an updated version of this dichotomy. The contemporary dilemmas facing Muriel were aligned along similar paths to those facing Mary years before. These similarities are evident in the style and the themes – beyond the reason and passion binary – that Stannard notes which are common to both writers. For Stannard, Spark's

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<sup>19</sup> Stannard (2009), p.116.

<sup>20</sup> Stannard (2009), p.116.

<sup>21</sup> Stannard (2009), pp.116-117.

[a]nalysis of Frankenstein's technique as 'the first of a new and hybrid fictional species' identifies Mary Shelley as the originator of a kind of female Gothic surrealism of which Muriel herself was to become the high priestess [...] this Child of Light had discovered a plain style in which realism and fantasy could cohabit: a voice, a variety of themes (the doppelgänger, the relationship between hunter and hunted, the imbalance of reason and imagination), and the ability to write across fictional genres which would help Muriel to discover her distinctive voice'.<sup>22</sup>

While the term Gothic surrealism is possibly more relevant to the likes of *Not To Disturb*, *Hothouse By The East River* (1973), *The Comforters*, *The Ballad Of Peckham Rye* (1960), *Memento Mori*, *The Driver's Seat*, and many of her short stories, Spark's invocation of the underlying Calvinist presence in Edinburgh's 'emblems of a dark and terrible salvation which made the fires of the damned seem very merry to the imagination by contrast' (*Jean Brodie*, p. 108), establish a Calvinist Gothic presence, while her fractured and disjointed use of time can be read as surrealist rejection of chronology. Nonetheless, Stannard is accurate in his identification of *Frankenstein's* influences on Spark, and these are evident throughout *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie*. The Doppelgänger relationship between Victor and the Monster is reflected in that between Jean Brodie and Sandy, just as the relationship between hunter and hunted in *Frankenstein* is echoed in Sandy's betrayal of Miss Brodie, and in turn in Miss Brodie's attempts to identify her betrayer.

As Spark has noted, the wider cultural and intellectual landscape at the time of *Frankenstein's* publication was reflected in the thematic content of Mary Shelley's novel. Despite the time difference, a number of these themes resurface in *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie*. In her study of Mary Shelley, Spark explains that the influences of Godwin, Mary's father, and Coleridge, are evident throughout *Frankenstein*. She says that

[t]he many conversations between Coleridge and Godwin, which Mary had listened to, were not lost on her. The influential currents of these two minds – Godwin representing the scientific empiricism of the previous century, and Coleridge, the nineteenth century's imaginative reaction – met in Mary's first novel. (*Child Of Light*, p.132)

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<sup>22</sup> Stannard (2009), p.117.

Here Spark delineates a binary where a rational, scientific eighteenth-century comes into contact with an imaginative, emotional nineteenth-century, creating the ‘fusion of the ways of thought of two epochs’ at the core of *Frankenstein (Child Of Light)*, p.133). By corraling the subjects of philosophy, art, and religion, Spark has Jean Brodie express a similar delineation between subjects of an emotional, imaginative, and creative nature with those of scientific empiricism. As with *Frankenstein*, the collision of the imagination and science is central to the scheme of the novel. As Miss Brodie bluntly states; ‘Art is greater than science. Art comes first, and then science’ (*Jean Brodie*, p.25). While there is a danger in oversimplifying a definition of these subjects as being collectively synonymous with ‘imagination’ or ‘emotion’, it is clear for Jean Brodie that the creative imagination required in these subjects is placed alongside emotion in a conventional – if reliant on a somewhat over-simplified definition where imagination is synonymous with emotion – demarcation between emotion and reason. Spark’s identification of the binary which inspired the discussions of Godwin and Coleridge is further evident when Jean Brodie says of Monica that ‘[t]here is very little soul behind that mathematical brain, and it may be that, in a fit of rage against that beauty, truth and goodness which was beyond her grasp, she turned and betrayed me’ (*Jean Brodie*, p.126). The division between ‘soul’ and ‘brain’ is parallel to that outlined by Spark between the Romantic and Enlightenment epochs in *Child Of Light*. This outlines the collective nature of the aesthetic, the creative, the philosophic, the imaginative, and the emotional, as existing beneath one all-encompassing definition for Miss Brodie.

Jean Brodie consistently reiterates the importance of those subjects which correspond to a bias of the Romantic over the Enlightenment epochs that also collide in *Frankenstein*. On a separate occasion from that mentioned above, she says: ‘Art and religion first; then philosophy; lastly science. That is the order of the great subjects of life, that’s their order of importance’ (*Jean Brodie*, p.25). Throughout the novel, Jean Brodie espouses the values and traits of romanticism as the central tenets of her teaching. Her

imaginative faculties are repeatedly utilised as she (re)presents herself as a woman remade in the image of those lifted from her favourite works of art. And as Martin Price notes, '[i]t is not Eunice ("famous for her sprightly gymnastics and glamorous swimming") or Rose ("famous for sex") who feels her influence and becomes her counterpart; it is Sandy Stranger, the clever, imaginative one'.<sup>23</sup> The Romantic imagination ties Sandy and Jean Brodie together in a relationship that echoes that of Victor Frankenstein and his creation the Monster. Like the Monster, Sandy rejects the authority of her mentor, and likewise rejects her teacher's attempts to 'create' her.

Yet Miss Brodie's battle for the dominance of imagination over reason, or the emotional over the rational, is predominantly futile. She has already lost Sandy at this point to the lure of Miss Lockhart and her science class, just as Gordon Lowther will be lost on his engagement too. Miss Brodie's narrow distinctions are called into doubt by the girls at a young age, especially when Sandy encounters Miss Lockhart in her 'natural setting'; the science room (*Jean Brodie*, p.24). Sandy inverts the notion that the subjects favoured by Miss Brodie provide freedom; "All the girls in the science room were doing just as they liked," said Sandy, 'and that's what they were supposed to be doing'" (*Jean Brodie*, pp.24-25). For Sandy, the science room not only provides the glamour of the beautiful Miss Lockhart, but it is the realm where freedom and imagination are encouraged, countering the prescriptive dogma of Miss Brodie's supposedly creative and imaginative forays into the arts. 'The science class is supposed to be free, it's allowed' says Sandy (*Jean Brodie*, p.25), in stark contrast to Miss Brodie's dictatorial lessons which create the illusion of artistic creativity and freedom through their subject matter, but are in fact her subjective opinions presented as objective fact. Sandy challenges Miss Brodie's teaching methods, aware that the science class provides information rather than opinions. She says that Miss

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<sup>23</sup> Martin Price, 'Splendid by Destructive Egotism', *The New York Times*, 21 January 1962. <[http://www.nytimes.com/books/97/05/11/reviews/spark-brodie.html?\\_r=1&scp=1&sq=splendid%20by%20destructive&st=cse](http://www.nytimes.com/books/97/05/11/reviews/spark-brodie.html?_r=1&scp=1&sq=splendid%20by%20destructive&st=cse)> [accessed 23 February 2011] (para.5 of 8).



Brodie is ‘not supposed to give us freedom, she’s supposed to give us lessons’ (*Jean Brodie*, p.25), identifying at an early age that her teacher’s methodology and ideological stances are selling her pupils short.

However, while Sandy reacts to Miss Brodie with imaginative vehemence, the others find the influence of Miss Brodie much easier to dismiss. Looking back at her school days from a distance of twenty-eight years, Eunice, who has embraced the world of science and medicine by becoming a nurse and marrying a doctor, sees no danger in Miss Brodie. She tells her husband that Miss Brodie ‘[w]as full of culture. She was an Edinburgh Festival all on her own [...] But she wasn’t mad. She was as sane as anything. She knew exactly what she was doing [...] She was just a spinster’ (*Jean Brodie*, p.27). Eunice has felt Miss Brodie’s influence as positive, and has ignored Miss Brodie’s attempts to discourage her pupils in science. There is sadness, an almost dismissive rejection of her old teacher as being anything but remotely sinister when she says: ‘She was just a spinster’ (*Jean Brodie*, p.27). It is only Sandy who has the insight, the perception, to see beyond Miss Brodie’s attempts to ‘lead out’ (*Jean Brodie*, p.37) the girls, and to see the danger of Miss Brodie’s attempts to recreate the girls in her own image.

The opposition of imagination and science returns us to *Frankenstein* and Mary Shelley. Having identified the broad definition of the differences between the Romantic and Enlightenment epochs, Spark goes on to analyse how they combine to ruin Victor Frankenstein by comparing his character to that of his creation, the Monster. Spark states that ‘Frankenstein’s relationship to the monster expresses itself in the paradox of identity and conflict – an anticipation of the Jekyll-and-Hyde theme’ (*Child Of Light*, p.137). Spark highlights the dualistic nature of both novels, and in doing so, she identifies the romantic and Scottish literary traditions out of which *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie* is born. This ‘paradox of identity and conflict’ lies at the heart of both Spark’s and Shelley’s novels. In *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie* this is focused on the relationship between Miss Brodie and

Sandy, but also within the characters themselves. In *Frankenstein* this is also the case, the interior conflict of both Victor and the Monster played out in the public realm. And as with the archetype of *Jekyll and Hyde*, the characteristics of the creator are evident in the created. Spark quotes excerpts from the following passage from *Frankenstein*:

I considered the being whom I had cast among mankind and endowed with the will and power to effect purposes of horror, such as the deed which he had now done, nearly in the light of my own vampire, my own spirit let loose from the grave, and forced to destroy all that was dear to me. (*Frankenstein*, p.74)

Here Frankenstein identifies elements of himself incarnate in the Monster. Spark continues:

We may visualise Frankenstein's doppelganger or Monster firstly as representing reason in isolation, since he is the creature of an obsessional rational effort [...] The manifest change in Frankenstein's nature after the creation of the Monster can be explained by the part-separation of his intellect from his other integral properties [...] And he admits [...] 'I allowed myself to be governed by the impulses of the moment'. (*Child Of Light*, p.137) <sup>24</sup>

Spark sees the Monster as the culmination of Victor's scientific pursuits, the reasoning, rational part of his personality finding expression. For Spark these 'other integral properties' are his emotional faculties, those in opposition to – or rather, those required to maintain a level of equilibrium with – his rational and scientific impulses. The pursuit of scientific achievement leads to the creation of the Monster, but it is the 'part-separation' of his rational from his emotional side following the Monster's creation that brings about the novel's central conflict. Spark continues:

After the Monster's "birth", then, Frankenstein is a disintegrated being – an embodiment of emotion and also of imagination minus intellect. When, in his final reflections, Frankenstein realises that it was not always so, and exclaims, 'My imagination was vivid, yet my powers of analysis and application were intense; by the union of these qualities I conceived the idea and executed the creation of a man', he reminds us of those eighteenth-century geniuses (the story of Frankenstein is set in that century) whose too-perfect balance of imaginative and rational

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<sup>24</sup> Spark quotes from *Frankenstein*, p.148.

faculties did in fact so often disintegrate and ultimately destroy them. (*Child Of Light*, pp.137-138)<sup>25</sup>

It is in Frankenstein's reaction to the Monster's first breath of life that he disintegrates, and abandons not only the Monster, but the rational part of his nature required to maintain a cohesive and balanced identity. For Spark, emotion and imagination without intellect are the cause of Frankenstein's downfall, and it is impossible not to think of Miss Brodie in these terms, and to see deepening parallels in her relationship with Sandy and that between Victor Frankenstein and his creation the Monster. Despite her oft-repeated claims that she is in her prime, Jean Brodie has no such genius on which to blame her over-reliance on the emotional and imaginative aspects of her personality. Rather it is the over-Romanticising of her experiences and her exaggerated romantic self-fashioning that result in the imbalance of the 'imaginative and rational faculties' (*Child Of Light*, p.138) that ultimately destroys her.

Throughout Spark's novel, Miss Brodie rails against all attempts to suppress the artistic temperament or to place the rational above the imaginative. Faced with a sign stating 'safety first', Miss Brodie informs the girls that '[s]afety does not come first. Goodness, Truth and Beauty come first. Follow me' (*Jean Brodie*, p.10). Given her penchant for Mussolini and his fascist leanings, her instruction to 'follow me', implies more than a straightforward physical instruction to her class. It hints at her Messianic tendencies, her belief in her own influence and an exaggeration of her power in line with her political leanings. Spark consistently ironises Miss Brodie in this way, allowing the latter to reveal her true nature and to portray herself as a version of 'those eighteenth-century geniuses [...] whose too-perfect balance of imaginative and rational faculties did in fact so often disintegrate and ultimately destroy them' (*Child Of Light*, p.138). This imbalance is evident when Miss Mackay states that 'Culture cannot compensate for lack of hard knowledge' (*Jean Brodie*, p.66), a thinly veiled attack on Miss Brodie's teaching.

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<sup>25</sup> Spark quotes from *Frankenstein*, p.148.

That Miss Brodie does not teach ‘hard knowledge’ is revealed early in the novel: ‘All of the Brodie set, save one, counted on its fingers, as had Miss Brodie, with accurate results, more or less’ (*Jean Brodie*, p.6).

This division of culture and hard knowledge, or imagination and intellect, reflects the dichotomy outlined by Spark at the outset of *Child Of Light*, where ‘Reason had not yet given way to feeling’, and ‘the scientific empiricism of the previous century’ had yet to give way to ‘the nineteenth century’s imaginative reaction’ (*Child Of Light*, pp.9, 132). The scope of this ongoing battle between these disparate sets of ideologies is outlined by Spark in the following passage:

As Frankenstein clashed with his Monster, so did fixed religious beliefs with science: so did imaginative and emotional substitutes for religion, with scientific rationalism; so did the intuitive and lush passions of the new era, with the dialectical, material and succinct passions of the eighteenth century.  
(*Child Of Light*, pp.138-139)

Jean Brodie encapsulates these clashes in her ‘hectic and undisciplined enthusiasms’.<sup>26</sup> Her fascination with Italian and Renaissance art is exactly the kind of imaginative and emotional substitute for religion that Spark identifies in *Frankenstein*; her attempts to mould the girls exactly the kind of solipsistic self-belief that drives Victor Frankenstein.

The subject of whether Miss Brodie is to be viewed with sympathy or scorn is reflected in the debate between Mary and Percy Shelley with regards to Victor. Spark states that Percy Shelley, Mary’s husband,

would see Frankenstein, in his role of creator, as the perpetrator of human misery and therefore an object of hatred. And, Mary added, he is the sufferer from human misery and therefore an object of pity. But, she also added, he is an amoral product of nature, on whom no responsibility can be attached, towards whom no passion can logically be entertained [...] these questions, typical of the Romantic outlook, form the moral spirit of her novel. (*Child Of Light*, p.139)

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<sup>26</sup> Price (1962), (para., 4 of 8) [accessed 23 February 2011].

In positing a parallel between Miss Brodie and Victor Frankenstein, these questions become pertinent to Spark's novel and its central character. Is Miss Brodie, in her role as a manipulator of her girls' personalities, to be viewed as 'the perpetrator of human misery and therefore an object of hatred' (*Child Of Light*, p.139), or as an object of pity who suffers from human misery? As David Lodge correctly states, 'the answer to the question, 'Should we approve or disapprove of Miss Brodie?' is, 'Both''.<sup>27</sup> She is 'an amoral product of nature, on whom no passion can be logically entertained' (*Child Of Light*, p.139), albeit a product of her own nature. Her attempt to make Rose and Teddy Lloyd lovers is evidence enough of a dangerous, controlling streak, but her complicity in Joyce-Emily's death on the way to the Spanish Civil War is damning. She is dangerous. Yet she undoubtedly suffers, often because of herself. She loses Gordon Lowther to Miss Lockhart the science teacher, and she falls in love with the married Teddy Lloyd precisely because he is unattainable, allowing her to play out her courtly lover role.

The danger of imagination and rationality becoming imbalanced lies at the core of *Frankenstein* and *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie*. Spark's words are echoed by Flannery O'Connor, who depicts the importance of maintaining a balance between the two, even for the artist:

St. Thomas called art "reason in making." This is a very cold and very beautiful definition, and if it is unpopular today, this is because reason has lost ground among us. As grace and nature have been separated, so imagination and reason have been separated, and this always means an end to art. The artist uses his reason to discover an answering reason in everything he sees.<sup>28</sup>

This separation between imagination and reason is the cause of the downfall of both Victor Frankenstein and Jean Brodie. Spark alerts us to the dangers of Romanticism and the unconstrained imagination. But Spark does not countenance an outright rejection of all things Romantic, instead this is a warning that without reason, the solipsistic tendencies of

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<sup>27</sup> Lodge (1971), p.129.

<sup>28</sup> O'Connor (1979), p.82.

an unchecked Romantic sensibility will mean 'an end to art',<sup>29</sup> and in this case, an end to Miss Brodie.

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<sup>29</sup> O'Connor (1979), p.82.

### **Chapter 3 – Mocking the Stupendous Mechanism of the Creator: Calvinism, Solipsism, and the Author/God Analogy**

In her ‘Author’s Introduction to the Standard Novels Edition’ of *Frankenstein* in 1831, Mary Shelley takes the opportunity of a second print run to illuminate the reader on the circumstances surrounding the novel’s conception, and in doing so, she implies a comparison between her own act of artistic creation and that of Victor Frankenstein. She says: ‘And now, once again, I bid my hideous progeny go forth and prosper. I have an affection for it, for it was the offspring of happy days’ (*Frankenstein*, p.10). The double meaning is deliberate; her ‘hideous progeny’ is the monster of the tale, but also the tale itself, having taken on a life of its own following its first publication in 1818 and now, re-edited with minor alterations, about to re-embark on its journey from writer to reader.

Shelley’s use of ‘progeny’ and ‘offspring’ also makes clear the theme of birth, creation, and formation that runs through *Frankenstein*. She draws particular attention to the consequences of attempting such an act of creation, stating that ‘supremely frightful would be the effect of any human endeavour to mock the stupendous mechanism of the Creator of the world’ (*Frankenstein*, p.9). Implicit in this statement, just as in her words regarding her ‘hideous progeny’, is the awareness of the similarity between Victor’s actions, her own act of creating fiction, and the ‘mechanism of the Creator’ (*Frankenstein*, p.9). While the comment is with regard to Victor and his scientific attempts to create life, Shelley also implies the analogy between God and author, and the dangers and responsibilities inherent in undertaking or imitating such a task of creation.

At its core *Frankenstein* interrogates the ethical, philosophical and theological results of just such actions, and these concerns are also central to *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie*. Of particular note is the similarity between Victor Frankenstein and Jean Brodie, and the ways in which both attempt to create others, whether through science or manipulation. For many observers, this urge to emulate the role of God or creator has its

source in the elevation of the self common to both Romanticism and Calvinism. Lascelles Abercrombie says that romanticism ‘takes its most obvious form in egoism’,<sup>1</sup> and Don Cupitt also notes a post-romantic move towards the self:

In the modern age the old objective order of tenseless Reason has disappeared, and there has been a turn to subjectivity. This has created an insatiable demand for stories of selfhood. Since about the time of the Romantic Movement old-style Philosophy and theology have got weaker and weaker. Instead, the fictioneers [...] have come to dominate the culture.<sup>2</sup>

Cupitt’s analysis delineates the binaries of reason and subjectivity, encapsulating a move from an outward – to an inward – looking tendency, a move from theology and philosophy to fiction. Spark acknowledges this distinction when she says ‘I don’t claim my novels are truth – I claim that they are fiction, out of which a kind of truth emerges’.<sup>3</sup> Here Spark makes it clear that her fiction is no attempt to substitute for the type of theological and philosophical writing that Cupitt mentions, nor is it a challenge to scripture or Catholic theology, although it is often concerned with all of these. Indeed, it is Jean Brodie’s tendency to Romantic fictionalising and Calvinistic self-absolution that the novel attacks, and it is against the very post-Romantic selfhood which Cupitt identifies that Spark is reacting. Returning to Francis Russell Hart’s words in the introduction above, we see him identifying this elevation of the self in Spark’s ‘false individualists’, characters whose

behaviours defy their collectivity by various forms of absurd self-assertion, romantic, anarchic, antinomian. The theologian must see these self-assertions as diabolical forgeries of true individuality, which is found only through the self-surrender of the orthodox Christian.<sup>4</sup>

This elevation of the self is at the centre of Spark’s fictional concerns, where ‘[s]he sees the cult of character-worship as an anarchy generated by the Romantic egoism that grew

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<sup>1</sup> Abercrombie (1963), p.103.

<sup>2</sup> Don Cupitt, *What is a Story?* (London: SCM Press Ltd, 1991), p.xi.

<sup>3</sup> Kermode (1992), p.30.

<sup>4</sup> Hart (1978), p.303.



from Calvinism'.<sup>5</sup> It is, however, crucial to note the distinction that Hart makes between these 'forms of absurd self-assertion', and those which involve 'self-surrender', but which are necessary to 'true individuality'.<sup>6</sup> This 'true individuality'<sup>7</sup> is found only for Spark, and possibly Sandy, within the framework of Catholicism. It is not found without its own struggles, and this central point is the focus of the present chapter.

It is this emphasis on the self, born from the remnants of Romanticism and Calvinism, which come under scrutiny in Spark's novel, the self which – as Mary Shelley warns above – attempts to play God with the lives of others. Of all the Romantic thinkers, it is Samuel Taylor Coleridge who makes perhaps the most direct link between the creative imagination of the author and God. He says

My Opinion is this [...] that I believe the Souls of five hundred Sir Isaac Newtons would go to the making up of a Shakspeare or a Milton [...] Mind in his system is always passive – a lazy Looker-on on an external World. If the mind be not passive, if it be indeed made in God's Image, and that too in the sublimest sense – the image of the Creator – there is ground for suspicion, that any system built on the passiveness of the mind must be false, as a system.<sup>8</sup>

The rational, reasoning, scientific mind is dismissed by Coleridge as passive, merely an observer. It is the active, imagining, creating mind that most resembles God, and if we are made in God's image, then it is through attempting to transcend the tangible and imagine what lies beyond, that we achieve this sublimity. This transfigurational process is in large part the basis for the Romantic ethos 'in which objects are charged with a significance beyond their physical qualities',<sup>9</sup> which as previously noted, is a central theme in *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie*. It is evident from Coleridge's words that it is through engaging with one's Romantic imagination that the mind of the writer most resembles that of God. For Spark this is where Romantic ideas about the self over-reach themselves, and react

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<sup>5</sup> Hart (1978), p.303.

<sup>6</sup> Hart (1978), p.303.

<sup>7</sup> Hart (1978), p.303.

<sup>8</sup> Samuel Taylor Coleridge, Letter to Thomas Poole, 23 March 1801. In *The Collected Letters of Samuel Taylor Coleridge*, Volume II, 1801-1806, ed. by Earl Leslie Griggs (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1965), p.709.

<sup>9</sup> Abrams (1985), p.115.

with the self-absolution of Calvinism to create the solipsism that she interrogates in *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie*.

As noted in the introduction, Margery Palmer McCulloch identifies the manner in which both the thematic content and the narrative structure of *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie* are also concerned with the analogy between author and God, stating that

[t]here are in fact two Calvinist God-authors in *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie*: Spark herself, manipulating fictional form, making patterns with facts, showing us how she creates and controls her characters, leading them to the end she has predestined; and her creation, Miss Jean Brodie, who attempts to predetermine the lives her chosen girls will lead'.<sup>10</sup>

Here McCulloch envisions two distinct, and arguably notably Calvinist – in their shared proclivity to predetermine – author-Gods in Spark and Jean Brodie, just as *Frankenstein* has Mary as the author-God who constructs the story and all the characters and actions within, and Victor playing God in his construction of the Monster.

McCulloch here conflates the narrator with the author, or rather the narrative structure with Spark herself, despite there being strong evidence to suggest that both the narrative voice and the structure of the novel have been specifically chosen by Spark to explore the analogy between an expressly Calvinist God and the creation of fiction. Spark discusses this in terms of the distance between the narrator and the author, stating that

[w]ith 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.<sup>11</sup>

Spark is still the overseeing author-God, but here she makes a clear distinction by adding yet another layer to the analogy. She gives responsibility for her characters to a narrator who is not her, but a character whose narrative technique is structured in such a way as to

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<sup>10</sup> McCulloch (1999), p.94.

<sup>11</sup> Muriel Spark, 'My Conversion', in *Critical Essays on Muriel Spark*, ed. by Joseph Hynes (New York: G. K. Hall, 1992), pp. 24-28. Excerpted and reprinted from *Twentieth Century*, 170 (1961): 58-63. Subsequent references will be dated '(1992)b'.

embody yet interrogate the concept of a Calvinist God-author. With regards to *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie* we should therefore delineate between Spark as author-God, the narrator as (the character of a) Calvinist narrator-God, and Miss Brodie as Calvinist character-God.

It is Spark's use of prolepsis and analepsis that initially sets *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie* apart from the majority of realist fiction and alerts the reader to the particular nature of the author-God analogy at work. While the omniscient authorial position of the writer of any novel can be considered analogous with God, in *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie* the narrator does not deliberately withhold the outcome from the reader for the sake of suspense, but rather draws the reader into a perhaps unwilling collusion by giving away outcomes through the uses of flash-forward and flashback.

The first notable example is when the death of Mary Macgregor is revealed. Having been asked by Miss Brodie "What was I saying?", 'Mary [...] who, at the age of twenty-three, lost her life in a hotel fire, ventured, "Golden"' (*Jean Brodie*, p.14). The emphasis is placed on her answer to the question, while Mary's death is dismissed as an aside, relegated as secondary to Miss Brodie's question and whether or not Mary has been paying attention. The effect is disconcerting, a sudden revelation that the reader will be privy to the lives of the characters in a way that the characters themselves will not. Not only is this unsettling from a philosophical or ethical perspective – we do not expect to continue reading about a character whose death has already been revealed, or to know this before they do – but from a narrative perspective it throws time and chronology into a confusing state where it is difficult to identify the present. This is best explained by David Lodge, who states

We are not, as readers, situated in the adult lives of the Brodie set, looking back with mixed emotions on their school-days; rather we are situated with them in their schooldays, but able to look forward occasionally, as they cannot, at what is to happen to them later.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Lodge (1971), p.126.

It is this ability to see forward in a mode comparable to predestination that perhaps best superimposes a Calvinistic tenor to the narrative, and the manner in which it focuses on ‘the moral dynamic of the action rather than simply the action itself’.<sup>13</sup>

Spark also uses verbal patterning in the repetition of numerous phrases throughout the novel to enhance the sense of the characters being trapped within a predetermined framework. We see this immediately following the revealing of Mary’s death when Sandy and Jenny absorb and repeat with innocent irony the words of the narrator. Scolding the hapless Mary for spilling ink on the floor – with no evidence whatsoever that she was responsible – Miss Brodie says ‘I’ve never come across such a clumsy girl’ (*Jean Brodie*, p.16). The narrator then informs us that ‘These were the days that Mary Macgregor, on looking back, found to be the happiest days of her life’ (*Jean Brodie*, p.16). The other girls have also been told that this is the case, as is evident in the following passage:

‘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’. (*Jean Brodie*, p.16)

The irony is that the reader soon knows exactly what lies ahead of them, as the narrative reveals the outcome of various aspects of the character’s lives throughout the novel. This is the narrator, just like Miss Brodie, as the ‘God of Calvin’ who ‘sees the beginning and the end’ (*Jean Brodie*, p.120), with the reader witness to the girl’s apparently predestined outcomes, trapped in awkward collusion and forced to consider whether or not the girl’s actions have any bearing upon their eventual outcomes. This awkwardness is encapsulated by David Lodge, who says that

[t]he prophetic glimpses of the future fate of her characters [...] do not serve the purpose of pat moralism or a reassuring providential pattern. They unsettle, rather

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<sup>13</sup> Carruthers (1997), p.519.

than confirm, the reader's ongoing interpretation of events, constantly readjusting the points of emphasis and the principles of suspense in the narrative.<sup>14</sup>

So while the narrative disjunction resembles the doctrine of Calvinism, it is, as Lodge attests, the disconcerting effect that this has on the reader that is the central point. In attempting to decode the narrative method, the reader is consistently required to question why they are being made aware of important plot points. For Lodge this is in itself such an unusual situation for the reader that it challenges their understanding of the novel's 'points of emphasis'.<sup>15</sup> Lodge is correct in noting that the narrative structure does not provide 'a reassuring providential pattern',<sup>16</sup> but Spark does employ a system of patterned phrasing – like a musical refrain – throughout the novel, which is closely tied to her choice of narrative structure and tone, a topic to which we shall return below.

The central plot aspects of the story are initially disclosed in a flash-forward early in the novel:

It was twenty-eight years after Eunice did the splits in Miss Brodie's flat that she, who had become a nurse and married a doctor, said to her husband one evening [...] 'Her retirement was rather a tragedy, she was forced to retire before time [...] There's a long story attached to Miss Brodie's retirement. She was betrayed by one of her own girls, we were called the Brodie set. I never found out which one betrayed her'. (*Jean Brodie*, pp.26-27)

Eunice makes clear that Miss Brodie's influence over the girls may have been powerful in their youth, hence the tragedy, but by this point in their adult lives, Miss Brodie is inconsequential; 'She was just a spinster' (*Jean Brodie*, p.27) says Eunice. This is one of many passages that reveal what will happen in the future, but as Lodge has observed, the most effective consequences of the fractured time frame come with the disorientation it causes, and the questions it poses the reader regarding cause and effect. Shortly after the passage above, where Eunice reveals Miss Brodie's betrayal, we hear Miss Brodie say 'I do not think ever to be betrayed' (*Jean Brodie*, p.39). Here again, knowing what she does

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<sup>14</sup> Lodge (1971), p.121.

<sup>15</sup> Lodge (1971), p.121.

<sup>16</sup> Lodge (1971), p.121.

not, the reader is inclined to feel sympathy for Miss Brodie, who is unaware that what she fears will come to pass. Yet Miss Brodie seems unchanged, unwilling to learn from any of the setbacks that occur. When she says of the music master Gordon Lowther, ‘If I wished I could marry him tomorrow’ (*Jean Brodie*, p.113), she is immediately undermined, as we learn that ‘The morning after this saying, the engagement of Gordon Lowther to Miss Lockhart, the science teacher, was announced’ (*Jean Brodie*, p.113). Miss Brodie is ‘greatly taken aback’ (*Jean Brodie*, p.113), but her belief that ‘God was on her side whatever her course’ (*Jean Brodie*, p.85) means that she has no reason for introspection or self-examination. This is evident when Miss Brodie’s betrayer is revealed, not even half-way through the novel; ‘It is seven years, thought Sandy, since I betrayed this tiresome woman’ (*Jean Brodie*, p.60). The passage ends with a simile that perfectly captures the absurdity of Miss Brodie’s stance, and the antinomian belief in the elect, whose actions have no bearing on their assured place in heaven. We see Sandy, ‘looking at the hills as if to see there the first and unbetrayable Miss Brodie, indifferent to criticism as a crag’ (*Jean Brodie*, p.60).

Yet it is this surety that is the contradiction at the core of the antinomian creed. Enacted within the narrative is the embodiment of the Calvinist ‘belief that God had planned for practically everybody before they were born a nasty surprise when they died’ (*Jean Brodie*, p.108). Miss Brodie’s demise is not her death; it is her betrayal and forced retirement that symbolise her death. Her sense of purpose and determination in the way she teaches according to her singular educational agenda, the selection of her own personally chosen elect – the set – and her lack of a ‘sense of hypocrisy in worship while at the same time she went to bed with the singing master’ (*Jean Brodie*, p.85), sets her up for exactly this kind of ‘nasty surprise’ (*Jean Brodie*, p.108). It is her Romantic individualism, bolstered through her ‘struggles with the authorities on account of her educational system’ (*Jean Brodie*, p.112), and her ‘actions [which] were outside the context of right and wrong’ (*Jean Brodie*, p.86), that have implanted in her the ‘erroneous sense of joy and salvation’

(*Jean Brodie*, p.109) so that her ‘surprise at the end might be the nastier’ (*Jean Brodie*, p.109). What makes it all the more disquieting is that again we know of it before she does.

This is not however, performed out of cruelty to the characters – although the treatment of Mary is just this – but to illustrate the narrator’s resemblance to the Calvinist-God ‘who sees the beginning and the end’ (*Jean Brodie*, p.120). As discussed above, the narrator is not Spark, but a character created by Spark to function as analogous to a Calvinist God. Spark therefore enacts the Calvinist elements she is satirising through her narrator. Consequently we are witness to Miss Brodie’s symbolic death because this occurs within the novel’s framework under the Calvinist-God narrator’s vision. As Spark does not believe Calvinism to be the true form of Christianity, the narrator’s Calvinist universe can only exist in the world of fiction; there is no possibility that it can exist beyond it. Sandy’s fate remains unclear, but as she is an embodiment of the mystery of the true – as Spark sees it – Catholic faith, Miss Brodie’s story ends as the Calvinistic narration has come to its conclusion, while Sandy’s fate remains beyond the parameters of the narrator’s vision and control.

In addition to the use of disrupted linearity, Spark also uses verbal patterning alongside modulation of tone and register to illustrate the Calvinistic omnipresence that permeates the Edinburgh of *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie*. Throughout the novel we encounter patterns of verbal repetition, for example Miss Brodie’s ‘I am in my prime’ (*Jean Brodie*, p.10) and ‘crème de la crème’ mantras (*Jean Brodie*, p.14), the girls’ ‘happiest days of our lives’ (*Jean Brodie*, p.16), and ‘the economy of Teddy Lloyd’s method’ (*Jean Brodie*, p.101). However, it is the depiction of Mary Macgregor and the rendering of her death that stand out for a number of reasons. This is our introduction to her; ‘Along came Mary Macgregor, the last member of the set, whose fame rested on her being a silent lump, a nobody whom everybody could blame’ (*Jean Brodie*, p.8). The next passage regarding Mary is similar in tone and language; ‘Mary sat lump-like and too stupid to invent something. She was too stupid ever to tell a lie; she didn’t know how to cover up’

(*Jean Brodie*, p.11). The recurrence of the pejoratives ‘stupid’ and ‘lumpy’ set the tone for the rest of the novel, where Mary’s apparent faults are repeatedly highlighted by the other characters and the narrator, and where her inability to lie is seen as a flaw. Her role is that of a scapegoat for the ‘elect’ girls to blame in order that they and Miss Brodie remain absolved by comparison.

We learn of Mary’s death at the close of the first chapter, in a passage of what is now becoming a pattern:

Mary Macgregor, lumpy, with merely two eyes, a nose and a mouth like a snowman, who was later famous for being stupid and always to blame and who, at the age of twenty-three, lost her life in a hotel fire, ventured, ‘Golden’.

(*Jean Brodie*, pp.13-14)

The use of ‘merely’ dehumanises her, while the refrain of ‘stupid’ and – in this case – ‘lumpy’ intensify the negative depiction of Mary in proportion to the reader’s now growing sympathy. It is worth noting the distinction here between the reporting of what are judgements by characters in the novel – ‘famous for being stupid’ – and ‘lumpy’, which is unflagged, in other words the narrator’s own judgement. Also notable is the casual, throwaway reference to Mary’s death, embedded as it is amongst another disparaging description of her physiognomy and lack of intellect. It renders her death as inconsequential, a notion that is exacerbated in the next reference:

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 ran into somebody on her third turn, stumbled and died. (*Jean Brodie*, p.15)

We are struck here by the matter-of-fact tone; the event is again presented in a detached and observational manner. Employing the technique of verbal patterning, the narrator then introduces the recurring phrase ‘hither and thither’ (*Jean Brodie*, p.28); “‘Sandy won’t talk to me,’ said Mary who later, in that hotel fire, ran hither and thither till she died.’ (*Jean*



*Brodie*, p.28). The phrase is repeated again when Mary is involved in an incident in the science class:

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'. (*Jean Brodie*, p.76)

The register of the idiomatic 'Hither and thither' is elevated, but the repetition of the 'th' phoneme gives the phrase a hint of the comic, which, given the context, comes off as mocking. The close proximity of the similar sounding syllables echoes the repetition of Mary's death throughout the novel, while the phrase's tongue-twisting assonance and feminine rhyme mimic the tongues of fire that torment Mary in the classroom and the hotel.

The use of 'Hither and thither' here is tonally inconsistent; a grand, archaic phrase which stands out amongst the passage's matter-of-fact observational tone. This is evident if we consider this passage but replace 'Hither and thither' with, for example, 'back and forth' – as used in the first passage on page fifteen. The tone and register are now consistent throughout; emotionally restrained, what Spark herself refers to as 'realistic reportage' (*Child of Light*, p.142). But as James Wood observes, it is the modulation of tone and register which serves to create a narrative that is animated, lifelike. He says '[i]t is partly by shifts in register that we gain a sense of a human voice speaking to us – Austen's, Spark's, Roth's'.<sup>17</sup> The shift in register of 'Hither and thither' creates this sense of the narrator's voice as human, as a character, with the individual agency and capacity for cruelty that this entails clearly evident.

The first use of the phrase is in relation to Mary's death, while the second is the description of her panic in the science room. The science room incident resembles and clearly foreshadows her death, but ironically comes after her death in the novel. This

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<sup>17</sup> James Wood, *How Fiction Works* (London: Jonathan Cape, 2008), p.150.

retrospective foreshadowing is a particularly ingenious technique for unsettling the reader whilst intensifying the sense that Mary's fate is sealed, that cause and effect have been dissociated, and Mary's hellish demise has been inevitable from her birth. The 'Hither and thither' motif acts as a musical refrain, re-emerging throughout the novel to remind us that Mary's future has been predetermined, that in this case the meek shall not inherit the earth. This is further reinforced when her death and its attendant phrase is repeated near the end of the novel: 'She heard again from Miss Brodie at the time of Mary Macgregor's death, when the girl ran hither and thither in the hotel fire and was trapped by it' (*Jean Brodie*, pp.126-127). Here again the narrator's repetition of 'hither and thither' seems gratuitous, an unnecessary addition to the repeated reference to her death. However, in its verbal patterning of mocking cruelty, it serves to illustrate that no matter which direction Mary chooses to run, she cannot escape her predestined fate. It also underlines the absurdity of the Calvinist or antinomian creed, where Mary, who is innocent, naive and honest, is symbolically damned irrespective of her actions.

Yet some observers still see the narrator as objective or uncommitted. Isobel Murray and Bob Tait note that '*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'.<sup>18</sup> It is true that Sandy is the only character who is given any interiority in the narrative, but the narrator is far from uncommitted. The treatment of Mary shows a narrator who is committed to a subjective perspective, one which corresponds to a Calvinist God who has created people knowing that they are doomed to hell irrespective of their actions while on earth. All of this must be regarded however, in relation to Spark's previous comments where she states: 'I have to decide what the author of the narrative is like. It's not me, it's a character'.<sup>19</sup> We may find the narrative treatment of Mary unpleasant, but it is essential that we see the difference between the narrator and Spark

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<sup>18</sup> Isobel Murray and Bob Tait, *Ten Modern Scottish Novels* (Aberdeen: Aberdeen University Press, 1984), p.101.

<sup>19</sup> Spark, 'My Conversion', p.27.

herself. Consequently, we understand that Spark is undermining the narrative voice and the narrative structure; a world where doing good or evil has no bearing on one's outcome is one entirely at odds with Spark's Catholic faith.

Spark's interest in Calvinism can also be understood in terms of both her Edinburgh setting and the Scottish literary tradition. Sandy focuses on the particularly local version of religious fundamentalism peculiar to Edinburgh:

Fully to savour her position, Sandy would go and stand outside St Giles Cathedral or the Tolbooth, and contemplate these emblems of a dark and terrible salvation which made the fires of the damned seem very merry to the imagination by contrast, and much preferable [...] All she was conscious of now was that some quality of life peculiar to Edinburgh and nowhere else had been going on unbeknown to her all the time, and however undesirable it might be, she felt deprived of it; however undesirable, she desired to know what it was, and to cease to be protected from it by enlightened people. (*Jean Brodie*, p.108)

For Sandy, the dark emblems of Calvinism represent not only the city's underlying religious foundation, which 'pervaded the place in proportion as it was unacknowledged' (*Jean Brodie*, p.108) but the unifying presence among its people. Throughout the novel there are numerous assertions and inferences to Edinburgh's dualistic character, indeed it is one of the novel's central concerns, but for Sandy these are negated by Calvinism's all-encompassing weight. She visits Edinburgh's 'forbidden quarters' (*Jean Brodie*, p.109) for the first time, and 'comparing their faces with the faces from Morningside and Merchiston, she saw, with stabs of new and exciting guilt, that there was not much difference' (*Jean Brodie*, p.109). For Sandy, the City's religious foundation is democratic in its inclusive and judgemental vision; the rich and the poor are equally as likely to feel its wrath, unless, like Jean Brodie, one is a member of the elect.

Sandy is fascinated by Calvinism's pervasive unspoken presence, indeed she comes to feel 'deprived of it' (*Jean Brodie*, p.108). We can see her maturing as she seeks to escape from the protection of those around her, to have the freedom to rebel. This is evident in the following passage: 'It was the religion of Calvin of which Sandy felt

deprived, or rather a specific recognition of it. She desired this birthright; something definite to reject' (*Jean Brodie*, p.108). Sandy's initial excitement at this new-found presence in her life is challenged when it moves from the abstract to the real, in the form of Miss Brodie's machinations of Rose and Teddy Lloyd. We are told 'there was nothing new in the idea, it was the reality that was new' (*Jean Brodie*, p.119). It is at this point that Sandy rejects Miss Brodie and her Calvinist ideologies. Alan Massie states that Sandy has 'used Miss Brodie to free herself of [...] the brooding weight of Calvinism that has oppressed her childhood', but this is clearly not the case, as it is the absence of Calvinism that has burdened Sandy's childhood.<sup>20</sup> From the passages above it is clear that Sandy has found much in Calvinism to excite and fascinate her, and it is in this respect that it begins to fit the novel's pattern of duality and bilateral movement. She is attracted to, and then rejects Calvinism. She retrospectively admits that Miss Brodie's Calvinistic 'defective sense of self-criticism had not been without its beneficent and enlarging effects' (*Jean Brodie*, p.86), and at the point of entering the Catholic Church we are told '[s]he was more fuming, now, with Christian morals, than John Knox.' (*Jean Brodie*, p.125). It is also possible that Miss Brodie may have provided added incentive for Sandy to contemplate her religious beliefs. It is worth considering the following exchange:

'You have got insight, perhaps not spiritual, but you're a deep one, and Rose has got instinct, Rose has got instinct,'  
 'Perhaps not quite spiritual,' said Sandy. (*Jean Brodie*, p.107)

Initially this exchange seems to convey that Sandy is replying to Miss Brodie that Rose, just as Miss Brodie has evaluated Sandy, is 'perhaps not spiritual'. However, it is also possible to read Sandy's reiteration of Miss Brodie's judgement as a stunned, offended repetition, and not an observation on Rose. This changes the tone of the conversation entirely. With her interest piqued by her Calvinist surroundings in Edinburgh, Sandy now

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<sup>20</sup> Massie (1984), p.103.

looks to her own sense of spirituality, provoked by Miss Brodie's slight on her lack thereof. On hearing the news that Sandy has become a nun, Miss Brodie reacts by saying 'Do you think she has done this to annoy me?' (*Jean Brodie*, p.63). This comment highlights how far Miss Brodie's ego and overblown sense of self have spun out of control; it would be outlandish to think that a person would be willing to convert and join a religious order simply to spite another. Yet in the absurd world that Spark depicts, and in the context of Sandy and Miss Brodie's relationship, this is neither as strange as one might initially think, nor is it beyond the realms of possibility.

It is not only the unique Calvinistic atmosphere that stands out in the depiction of Edinburgh. As noted in the introduction, Miss Brodie draws attention to her own ancestry:

I am a descendant, do not forget, of Willie Brodie, a man of substance, a cabinet maker and designer of gibbets, a member of the Town Council of Edinburgh [...] Eventually he was a wanted man for having robbed the Excise Office – not that he needed the money, he was a night burglar only for the sake of the danger in it.  
(*Jean Brodie*, p.88)

This passage represents the confluence of a number of the central themes and concerns of the novel. Willie Brodie is better known as Deacon Brodie who, as Miss Brodie's comments attest, led a life of noted polarities. Respectable City Councillor by day and criminal by night, the reference to Deacon Brodie encapsulates the themes of duality and fractured identity that the novel interrogates. We see this in the relationship between Miss Brodie and Sandy, where Miss Brodie's attempts to influence the girls are both positive and negative, broadening yet reductive. As Alan Bold highlights, the mention of Deacon Brodie is part of a pattern of references to Scottish literary antecedents throughout the novel. Bold identifies Deacon Brodie as the inspiration for the 'original of Stevenson's dualistic Dr Jekyll',<sup>21</sup> a cross-reference which resonates through Spark's novel with its exploration of the Scottish dualistic psyche and the theme of double-ness that runs throughout.

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<sup>21</sup> Bold (1986), p.64.

Duality, the double, antithesis, religious fanaticism and the split psyche are not only present in such works as *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie*, *Jekyll and Hyde* (1886) and Hogg's *The Private Memoirs and Confessions of a Justified Sinner* (1824), but in a host of works in the Scottish literary tradition. It is possible to perceive Spark's novel within the trajectory that G. Gregory Smith identifies as the 'Caledonian anti-syzygy'; where 'antithesis of the real and the fantastic [...] the 'polar twins' of the Scottish Muse',<sup>22</sup> are signifiers of a wider Scottish psyche. However, it would be wrong to see it solely in these terms. Spark undoubtedly draws upon the Scottish literary tradition, using Burns as an exemplar for Hugh Carruthers in the imagination of Miss Brodie, and referencing Hogg and Robert Louis Stevenson to enhance the mood of Edinburgh's collective Calvinist consciousness and the duality of Sandy and Miss Brodie respectively.

However, while the novel undoubtedly 'creaks with contradictions native to Edinburgh',<sup>23</sup> Spark herself has noted a literary antecedent that predates Hogg's *Justified Sinner* and Stevenson's *Jekyll and Hyde*. In *Child of Light*, Spark identifies a pattern of pursuit that connects Victor Frankenstein to his creation, the Monster. This pattern, says Spark,

is the framework of the novel, a theme in itself which encloses a further theme; there, Frankenstein's relationship to the Monster expresses itself in the paradox of identity and conflict – an anticipation of the Jekyll and Hyde theme – from which certain symbolic situations emerge. (*Child Of Light*, p.137)

These themes are all present in *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie*. Initially the pursuit is that of Miss Mackay after Miss Brodie, but once Sandy is awakened to Miss Brodie's intentions, Sandy becomes the pursuer, superseding Miss Mackay despite lacking her authority. However, it is in this 'paradox of identity and conflict' (*Child Of Light*, p.137) that Spark's novel most resembles *Frankenstein*, as we witness the development of Sandy from schoolgirl who identifies with and imitates her teacher, to the teenager who comes

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<sup>22</sup> Smith (1919), p.4, p.20.

<sup>23</sup> Bold (1983), p.223.

into conflict with that same teacher and with Calvinism in its embodied form: Miss Brodie. *Frankenstein's* central concern – the act of playing God – also has a more direct echo in Spark's novel, than Stevenson's exploration of the split personality.

As outlined in chapter 2, there are enough thematic, stylistic and narrative similarities between *Frankenstein* and *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie* to make a strong case for Mary Shelley's novel as a direct influence on Spark's. While Spark undoubtedly draws on Scottish antecedents such as *Jekyll and Hyde*, it is worth considering some of the numerous literary allusions in *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie* to consider whether there is a pattern of meaning behind their use. Valerie Shaw discusses Spark's use of James Hogg's 'Kilmeny', noting that the brief allusion is 'too isolated for it to mean that Spark is counting on her reader to pursue the line beyond its fleeting occurrence in one comic scene'.<sup>24</sup> Shaw continues, saying that

[t]he effect is to concentrate in unstated ways what an unfolding plot more explicitly displays and to enrich atmosphere subtly without spoiling the lightness of [...] touch. It is left to the reader to reflect and amplify, or to perceive the similitudes and parallelisms.<sup>25</sup>

While there are numerous oblique art and literary allusions in the novel, there are a number that when considered together, serve to concentrate and deepen aspects of the main plot, as Shaw states. Starting with Hogg's 'Kilmeny' (*Jean Brodie*, p.38), many of Spark's allusions reveal a foretelling of Sandy's fate which acts as a counterpoint to the narrative of her conversion. The poem, an extract from Hogg's *The Queen's Wake* (1813), functions in the narrative to illustrate that 'Miss Brodie had not yet advanced far enough into her prime to speak of sex except by veiled allusion' (*Jean Brodie*, p.38). The heroine of 'Kilmeny' is abducted by fairies and returns to her home bewildered, unsure of where she has been, or for how long she has been missing. Tennyson's 'The Lady of Shallot' is also recited in class, activating Sandy's imaginative 'double-life' (*Jean Brodie*, p.21) where she

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<sup>24</sup> Shaw (1987), p.278.

<sup>25</sup> Shaw (1987), p.278.

is never bored, alleviating any tedium by conversing with literary figures such as ‘The Lady of Shallot’. Tennyson’s poem tells of the Lady and her entrapment in a tower overlooking Camelot, and the curse which prevents her from looking at the outside world except through the mirror in her room, whilst weaving a tapestry of what she sees. Miss Gaunt gives Rose ‘A hundred lines of *Marmion*’ (*Jean Brodie*, p.57), Walter Scott’s romantic epic, as punishment for talking in class. *Marmion* features Constance, a nun who is the lover of Lord Marmion, who becomes walled up in Lindisfarne convent for breaking her vows. The parallels between Sandy and Constance from *Marmion* are obvious, but ‘Kilmeny’ and The Lady of Shallot’ are also narratives of entrapment, imprisonment and isolation. A number of the other allusions in the novel reflect this; Charlotte Bronte’s *Jane Eyre*, read to the class by Miss Brodie, has Bertha Mason isolated in the attic, while Stevenson’s *Kidnapped* is the obvious example. The subtext of isolation and imprisonment that these allusions signify, enhance and deepen the pervasive atmosphere of predestination. They serve to reinforce the inevitability of Sandy’s situation at the novel’s end, where she ‘clutched the bars of her grille more desperately than ever’ (*Jean Brodie*, p.128). This depicts Sandy’s unease at her situation, despite her conversion being entirely her own choice. The tone of these literary allusions implies a warning, a deep sense of foreboding about Sandy’s salvation. This is not to say that Spark doubts Sandy’s choice to convert, rather she is subtly questioning the role that the authority of the convent will play on Sandy’s ability to remain individual and insightful, and how she will manage her own needs and demands with those of a much more powerful hegemonic organisation. This conflict between authority and the self is central to the novel’s exploration of Romanticism’s influence on the shaping of the modern self. On a narrative level, Sandy’s conversion is her moment of grace, her salvation at the recognition of the true Church, but the subtext tells a different story, and leaves the reader to resolve the two.

Reconciling these two oppositional threads returns us to the central themes of duality and contradiction that recur throughout Scottish fiction. As noted above, this has



led to the placing of Spark's novel within the trajectory of G. Gregory Smith's 'Caledonian anti-syzygy'.<sup>26</sup> However, Aileen Christianson sees the duality of the Edinburgh of Spark's novel as emanating from within a different framework. She claims that what can be understood as 'Sparkian paradox'<sup>27</sup> is not born from Smith's 'antithesis of the real and the fantastic [...] the "polar twins" of the Scottish Muse'.<sup>28</sup> Instead, she sees Spark's fiction as

connected to the medieval Catholic view of literature that the anagogical or highest level of interpretation can only be truly accessible to God. The roots of her fictional concerns are thus both Catholic and Calvinist, embodying [...] 'miraculous and contradictory qualities [...] understanding and incomprehension, yes and no'.<sup>29</sup>

So for Christianson, the Edinburgh of contradictions and dualities provides Spark with the ideal backdrop for the investigation of free will, choice, predestination and the exploration of seemingly contradictory doctrines within a context where many of these themes are woven into the cultural and religious fabric of the place. However, while the Scottish literary tradition as identified in Smith's 'Caledonian anti-syzygy'<sup>30</sup> is undoubtedly present in *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie*, it is not Spark's focus, rather it is a tradition that allows her to access the real concerns of spiritual and theological truth. Christianson states that 'Smith's "sudden jostling of contraries" becomes in Spark's work the acceptance of miraculous juxtapositions of the incompatible where the extraordinary and the mundane are in positive conjunction, equivalent and not antithetical'.<sup>31</sup> The proximity of opposing ideas in Spark's novel – reason and imagination, the Old Town and the New, Calvinism and Catholicism, art and religion, the sacred and the profane, free will and predestination, the individual and wider society, the natural and the supernatural – can thus be understood as the attempt to reconcile these oppositions.

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<sup>26</sup> Smith (1919) p.4.

<sup>27</sup> Aileen Christianson, 'Muriel Spark and Candia McWilliam: Continuities', in *Contemporary Scottish Women Writers*, ed. by Aileen Christianson and Alison Lumsden (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2000), pp.95-110, (p.98).

<sup>28</sup> Smith (1919) p.20.

<sup>29</sup> Christianson (2000), pp.98-99. Christianson quotes from Muriel Spark, *Reality and Dreams* (Harmondsworth; Penguin, 1997), p.111.

<sup>30</sup> Smith (1919), p.4.

<sup>31</sup> Christianson (2000), p.99.

The initial reaction to the dynamic that places Miss Brodie's Calvinism at odds with Sandy / Helena's Catholicism is understandable. In rejecting her teacher's attempts to predetermine the lives of her classmates, Sandy's conversion is placed in opposition to Miss Brodie's antinomianism. However, as Sandy's fascination with Calvinism attests – and even her excitement is framed in familiarly Catholic-sounding terms, with 'stabs of new and exciting Calvinistic guilt' (*Jean Brodie*, p.109) – the relationship between the two is more complex than simply considering them as oppositional. Aileen Christianson identifies this above, when she states that '[t]he roots of her fictional concerns are thus both Catholic and Calvinist'.<sup>32</sup> A similar position is outlined by John Henry Newman, who would be familiar to Spark as she has spoken of his importance in her life and work:

I began reading Newman - he was a tremendous influence [...] Newman, I feel, was outstanding because he was a great man and would have been a great man, if he had not been a Catholic. He was also a great writer, a persuasive stylist, which appealed to me greatly [...] Newman helped me to find a definite location.<sup>33</sup>

Crucial here is that Spark identifies a debt to Newman for his influence as a writer as well as the impact he has on her spiritual life. Central to this is his *Apologia Pro Vita Sua*, in which he outlines his religious development throughout his life. At one point Newman talks of the similarity between Calvinism and Catholicism, saying 'Calvinists make a sharp separation between the elect and the world; there is much in this that is parallel or cognate to the Catholic doctrine'.<sup>34</sup> As an avid student of Newman – she had read 'thirteen volumes of Newman'<sup>35</sup> in the years before her conversion to Catholicism in 1954 – Spark would be well aware of this, and for Valerie Shaw, it is evidence that with relation to Spark, 'it would be wrong to see her Catholicism as merely opposing her Edinburgh background'.<sup>36</sup> This is evident in Sandy / Helena's conversation with a visitor to the convent:

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<sup>32</sup> Christianson (2000), p.99.

<sup>33</sup> Spark, 'My Conversion', pp.24-25.

<sup>34</sup> Newman (1977), p.99.

<sup>35</sup> Stannard (2009), p.144.

<sup>36</sup> Shaw (1987), p.281.

‘The influences of one’s teens are very important,’ said the man.  
 ‘Oh yes,’ said Sandy, ‘even if they provide something to react against.’  
 (*Jean Brodie*, pp.34-35)

As previously discussed, Sandy’s fascination with Calvinism is crucial, providing her with a stark awakening of her spirituality, and – embodied in Jean Brodie – with ‘something definite to reject’ (*Jean Brodie*, p.108). The similarities between the two doctrines as outlined by Newman, and the complexity of Sandy’s relationship with Calvinism, are encapsulated by Irving Malin, who says of Sandy, ‘She reaches her “prime,” as it were, in rebellious betrayal. The ironies are compounded. By asserting her “freedom” in this way, she becomes as falsely “divine” as Miss Brodie – perhaps even more so.’<sup>37</sup> Malin asserts that in betraying Miss Brodie in the manner in which she does, Sandy is guilty of exactly the self-election to grace of which Miss Brodie is guilty.

The false divinity of Calvinism is the divinity that is self-given, and it is on this point that Newman is clear in identifying the disparity between Catholicism and Calvinism. He states that in Calvinism ‘the converted and the unconverted can be discriminated by man, that the justified are conscious of their state of justification, and that the regenerate cannot fall away’, while for the Catholic, ‘there is no certain knowledge that he is in a state of grace, and much less that he is to preserve it to the end’.<sup>38</sup> Miss Brodie has been conscious of her justification throughout, but this is reversed when Sandy says to Miss Brodie: ‘If you did not betray us it is impossible that you could have been betrayed by us. The word betrayed does not apply’ (*Jean Brodie*, p.126). However, by the end of the novel, as Sandy ‘clutched the bars of her grille more desperately than ever’ (*Jean Brodie*, p.128), there is the sense that, in Newman’s words, she has ‘no certain knowledge that [she] is in a state of grace’.<sup>39</sup> Sandy, having turned betrayer, has lost her sense of

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<sup>37</sup> Irving Malin, ‘The Deceptions of Muriel Spark’, in *The Vision Obscured: Perceptions of Some Twentieth-Century Catholic Novelists*, ed. by Melvin J. Friedman (New York: Fordham University Press, 1970), pp.95-108 (p.103).

<sup>38</sup> Newman (1977), p.99, p.99.

<sup>39</sup> Newman (1977), p.99.

validation, and has returned to a Catholic state where she cannot be sure of grace. On this point, Valerie Shaw says that

[u]ncertainty of this sort frequently distinguishes the Spark characters who can be called seekers, from those who, like Miss Brodie, are convinced of their own election to grace: and the same principle can be said to characterise the novelist's dealings with her readers, who are often left with radical doubts about which (if any) of the fictional characters is in a state of grace.<sup>40</sup>

By blurring the boundaries between Calvinism and Catholicism, we see Sandy as one of these seekers, unsure of grace, and fully aware 'of the possibility and the danger of falling away'.<sup>41</sup>

Shaw also sees another benefit to Spark resulting from Newman's writings. She states that '[t]he common ground discerned by Newman between Calvinism and Catholicism may be partly what allows Spark to write recognisably Catholic fiction while drawing on an artistic tradition which took specific forms in earlier Scottish fiction'.<sup>42</sup> This is true in that Spark has drawn on many of the themes that this tradition has focused on; duality, the split self, the fanaticism of Calvinism and Presbyterianism. It is also true that *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie* uses Edinburgh not just as a backdrop, but as a theme in itself, the incarnation in stone of many of these ideas and philosophies. Indeed the mood, atmosphere and construction of Edinburgh is a part of the fabric and structure of the novel, the physical embodiment of Spark's 'nevertheless' principle. However, Spark draws on a wide range of literature, and as outlined above, finds many of these themes and concerns outside Scotland, and – it is worth noting again – in Romanticism and in *Frankenstein* in particular.

One theme which is common to both *Frankenstein* and *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie* relates to the writings of Newman, and that is the theme of Prometheus. Spark outlines the importance of Mary Shelley's title, saying

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<sup>40</sup> Shaw (1987), p.281.

<sup>41</sup> Newman (1977), p.99.

<sup>42</sup> Shaw (1987), p.281.

The most obvious theme is that suggested by the title, *Frankenstein – Or, The Modern Prometheus*. (That casual, alternative *Or* is worth noting, for though at first Frankenstein is himself the Prometheus, the vital fire-endowing protagonist, the Monster, as soon as he is created, takes on the role. His solitary plight [...] and more especially his revolt against his creator, establish his Promethean features. So, the title implies, the Monster is an alternative Frankenstein). (*Child Of Light*, p.134)

The parallels between Jean Brodie and Victor Frankenstein, and between the Monster and Sandy are clearly evident. Initially Miss Brodie is the Promethean figure as she attempts to play God by creating the girls in her own image. However, once Sandy realises the danger in Miss Brodie's actions, she, like the Monster, also revolts against her 'creator' and becomes Promethean. Her isolation in the convent also evokes Prometheus' plight as he is punished by the gods for his act of stealing fire to create life. While Miss Brodie's other girls feel her influence to a lesser extent (with the exception of Joyce Emily, if we are to believe Miss Brodie), Sandy's relationship with her teacher has a clear resemblance to that of the Monster with Victor, as is evident when Spark says that

There are two central figures – or rather two in one, for Frankenstein and his significantly unnamed Monster are bound together by the nature of their relationship. Frankenstein's plight resides in the Monster, and the Monster in Frankenstein [...] several illicit themes [...] show these characters both as complementary beings and antithetical ones. (*Child Of Light*, p.134)

Sandy's existence is inextricably bound together with Miss Brodie's, but it is in the revolt against the authority of her teacher that Sandy's Promethean actions most closely resemble the conflict between 'Authority and Private Judgement'<sup>43</sup> that Newman outlines in his *Apologia Pro Vita Sua*, and this conflict will be the focus of the ensuing chapter.

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<sup>43</sup> Newman (1977), p.286.

## Chapter 4: Where there is no Vision: The Battle between Authority and Private Judgement

In her essay 'Spark and Newman: Jean Brodie Reconsidered', Benilde Montgomery discusses Newman's *Apologia Pro Vita Sua*, focusing on his belief in oppositional thought and rejecting the notion that Catholicism is guilty of unthinking submission to 'the super-incumbent oppression of Authority'.<sup>1</sup> Instead Newman argues that in the battle between

Authority and Private Judgement [...] it is the vast Catholic body itself, and it only, which affords an arena for both combatants in that awful, never-dying duel. It is necessary for the very life of religion, viewed in its large operations and its history, that the warfare should be incessantly carried on.<sup>2</sup>

Here Newman lays out his vision of the individual's crucial role within the body of the Church, outlining the need for 'The energy of the human intellect'<sup>3</sup> to be brought to bear upon the Church's teachings. This debate, he says, renders the 'Catholic Christendom [as] no simple exhibition of religious absolutism, but [...] a continuous picture of Authority and Private Judgement alternatively advancing and retreating as the ebb and flow of the tide'.<sup>4</sup> This raises two central points for Montgomery; firstly, '[i]n Newman's scheme, conversion is not a static business but a slow and continuing process', and secondly, 'conversion, for him, neither concludes nor leads to simple peace or repose'.<sup>5</sup> Both of these are pertinent to *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie*, and Montgomery uses Newman to readjust critical focus away from Jean Brodie onto Sandy and her conversion. We only have to think of Sandy / Helena clutching the 'bars of her grille' (*Jean Brodie*, p.128) to see a conversion that has not led to 'simple peace or repose'.<sup>6</sup> Yet as Newman argues, this is beneficial to both the individual and Catholicism, and clearly marks Newman's influence on Spark's novel.

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<sup>1</sup> Newman (1977), p.286.

<sup>2</sup> Newman (1977), p.286.

<sup>3</sup> Newman (1977), p.286.

<sup>4</sup> Newman (1977), p.286, p.286.

<sup>5</sup> Benilde Montgomery, 'Spark and Newman: Jean Brodie Reconsidered', in *Twentieth Century Literature*, 43, 1 (1997) 94-106 (p.95, p.95).

<sup>6</sup> Montgomery (1997), p.95.

Newman's words call for the individual to question modes of authority, rather than unthinkingly obey, and this is evident throughout *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie*. Spark's novel investigates the relationship between the individual and authority in relation to education, politics, culture and theology, and out of this grows a further area of unease; solipsism and the over-emphasis on the self. This last concern develops out of the Romantic era's assertion of self, what F.R. Hart calls 'fraudulent Romanticism bent on self-assertion',<sup>7</sup> a notion that Newman himself was concerned with even before his conversion to Catholicism.

The assertion of the self and the problem of finding one's individuality within a religious context is one that for Spark was solved by entering the Catholic Church. She outlines what may seem a paradoxical position, saying:

I take this attitude to Catholicism because it's really a Christian thing conducive to individuality, to finding one's own individual personal point of view. I find I speak far more with my own voice as a Catholic and I think I could prove it with my stuff.<sup>8</sup>

So for Spark, the adherence to Catholicism does not negate her individuality, but rather enhances it by giving her a voice, a sense of belonging; as Willy Maley states, 'Catholicism thus gave Spark a sense of selfhood rather than social responsibility'.<sup>9</sup> Indeed for Maley, 'Spark's Catholicism can by no stretch of the imagination be called communitarian, and is in fact quite in keeping with Protestant individualism'.<sup>10</sup> The identification of Protestant individualism, with its emphasis on a direct, unmediated relationship with God, brings us back to the Romantic era's focus on the self as a subject for poetry, and the subsequent growth in the interest of psychology. These concerns are

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<sup>7</sup> Hart (1978), p.303.

<sup>8</sup> Spark, 'My Conversion', p.26.

<sup>9</sup> Willy Maley, 'Not to Deconstruct? Righting and Deference in *Not to Disturb*', in *Theorizing Muriel Spark: Gender, Race, Deconstruction*, ed. by Martin McQuillan (Houndmills: Palgrave, 2002), pp.170-188 (p.180).

<sup>10</sup> Maley (2002), p.179.

central when we consider Miss Brodie, with her self-election to grace, and Sandy, with her insight and interest in psychology.

The central battle in the novel is that outlined by Newman, between ‘Authority and Private Judgement’,<sup>11</sup> and it occurs in a number of contexts. Miss Brodie is at odds with authority throughout, and her rejection of religion illustrates Spark’s understanding of Newman. As noted above, Miss Brodie makes extensive use of religion in her teaching of the girls, but draws only on its aesthetic appeal. We read that ‘the girls were set to study the Gospels with diligence for their truth and goodness, and to read them aloud for their beauty’ (*Jean Brodie*, p.36). Here ‘truth and goodness’ (*Jean Brodie*, p.36) are tokens, words for ‘those whom she could trust’ (*Jean Brodie*, p.26) to relate back to their parents who are ‘too enlightened to complain or too unenlightened’ (*Jean Brodie*, p.26). Miss Brodie merely invokes these religious terms, she does not elucidate upon them with relevance to any theological or doctrinal insight, nor does she use them to illustrate any moral didacticism. We hear that she keeps the Sabbath, while ‘attending evening classes in comparative religion at the University’ (*Jean Brodie*, p.36) while her Sundays involve ‘a rota of different denominations and sects [...] and any other church outside the Roman Catholic pale which she might discover’ (*Jean Brodie*, p.85). Miss Brodie is her own authority, refusing to commit to one denomination, sure only ‘that God was on her side whatever her course’ (*Jean Brodie*, p.85).

Her opposition to Catholicism is based on apparently misguided notions that Newman also identifies. We are told that ‘[h]er disapproval of the Church of Rome was based on her assertions that it was a church of superstition, and that only people who did not want to think for themselves were Roman Catholics’ (*Jean Brodie*, p.85). The last section is very close to what Newman sees as the prevailing misconception about the Catholic Church, where ‘[i]t is the custom with Protestant writers to consider that [...] they have all the Private Judgement to themselves, and we have the full inheritance and the

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<sup>11</sup> Newman (1977), p.286.



super-incumbent oppression of Authority'.<sup>12</sup> Miss Brodie voices exactly this when she hears that Sandy and Teddy Lloyd have become lovers, undoing her plans for Lloyd and Rose. She says to Sandy, 'He is a Roman Catholic and I don't see how you can have to do with a man who can't think for himself' (*Jean Brodie*, p.123). Miss Brodie's conception of Catholicism is one where individuality is negated, where authority eliminates private judgement, and her Romantic sensibility – with its emphasis on the self – cannot countenance such an idea. Yet the narrator questions this, saying that '[h]er attitude 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' (*Jean Brodie*, p.85). What the narrator outlines is a belief system where individuality is not excluded but nurtured, and where the damaging extremes of her Romantic sensibility would be reigned in to the benefit of Miss Brodie herself. It is the balance between 'true individuality, which is found only through the self surrender of the orthodox Christian',<sup>13</sup> and the solipsism of the unrestricted Romantic self. It comes as no surprise to find that the narrator's definition is remarkably close to that of Newman, who says:

There is a depth and power in the Catholic religion, a fullness of satisfaction in its creed, its theology, its rites, its sacraments, its discipline, a freedom yet a support also, before which the neglect or the misapprehension about oneself on the part of individual living persons, however exalted, is as much dust when weighed in the balance.<sup>14</sup>

Of all of Newman's letters that Spark co-edited with Derek Stanford, this resembles most closely Spark's position in *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie*. We see the parallels between the Catholicism that 'could have embraced, even while it disciplined' (*Jean Brodie*, p.85) Miss Brodie, and Newman's Catholicism which provides 'a freedom yet a support also'.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Newman (1977), p.286.

<sup>13</sup> Hart (1978), p.303.

<sup>14</sup> John Henry Newman, *Letters of John Henry Newman: A Selection edited and introduced by Derek Stanford and Muriel Spark* (London: Peter Owen Limited, 1957), p.160.

<sup>15</sup> Newman (1957), p.160.

Newman's words also undermine the Romantic position of the 'exalted' self, embodied in the Romantic artist and in Miss Brodie. She is guilty of just this kind of 'misapprehension about oneself [...] however exalted',<sup>16</sup> as she has exalted herself at the expense of the individuality, freedom and support of Sandy's Catholicism.

Newman's own experience in the Catholic Church reflects his ideas on the beneficial effects of the battle between authority and private judgement. However, this is not to be misconstrued as placing the emphasis on the individual above and beyond that of God. It is a subject that troubled him before his entry to the Catholic Church, as is evident from Ian Ker's study, *Healing the Wound of Humanity: The Spirituality of John Henry Newman*. Ker says that

[w]hen he was a member of the Church of England, Newman was highly critical of its powerful Evangelical wing, and one of his most telling criticisms was directed against an introspective rather than christocentric spirituality: 'Instead of looking off to Jesus, and thinking little of ourselves, it is at present thought necessary [...] to examine the heart with a view of ascertaining whether it is in a spiritual state or no'.<sup>17</sup>

It is this obsessive introspection that Newman sees as damning, but rather than being applicable to Miss Brodie, this has more resonance in relation to the psychologically analytical Sandy. Miss Brodie's sense of self may be out of control, but it is not due to the over-examination of the spiritual – or not – state of her heart. Miss Brodie's Romantically inclined ego is not introspective, evident when the narrator says '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' (*Jean Brodie*, p.85). Miss Brodie's solipsism derives more from the Calvinistic sense of being a member of the elect. We are told that 'the general absolution she had assumed for herself' means that 'she and her actions were outside the context of right and wrong' (*Jean Brodie*, pp.85-86). This divides Miss Brodie's personality into two

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<sup>16</sup> Newman (1957), p.160.

<sup>17</sup> Ian Ker, *Healing the Wound of Humanity: The Spirituality of John Henry Newman* (London: Darton, Longman and Todd Ltd, 1993), p.24. Ker quotes John Henry Newman, *Parochial and Plain Sermons*, 2 vols (London: Longmans, Green of London, 1890), II, p.171.

– albeit related – areas. In morality she is the self-absolving, non-introspective Calvinist, while in temperament and outlook she is a Romantic; viewing art, religion and culture together as aesthetic modes for the transfiguring of her commonplace. In Sandy's case, her interest in psychology at a young age, and her 'insight', seem to place her more in line with 'an introspective rather than christocentric spirituality'.<sup>18</sup> However, one of the main catalysts to her conversion is the analysis not of her own interiority, but of Teddy Lloyd's. We are told that

[b]y the end of the year it happened that she had quite lost interest in the man himself, but was deeply absorbed in his mind, from which she extracted, among other things, his religion as a pith from a husk. (*Jean Brodie*, p.123)

Here Sandy has moved from a psychological interest to an interest in theology, and finally to the procurement of another's religious beliefs. She can be seen to have a scientific, interrogative mind, whilst simultaneously exhibiting a christocentric spirituality; she is both inward and outward looking. Consequently it would be wrong to view Sandy / Helena's spiritual development as fixed from the moment she converts. In this respect we are returned to Montgomery's assertion that 'conversion is not a static business but a slow and continuing process',<sup>19</sup> and to Newman's battle between authority and private judgement.

Sandy's experience within the convent shows exactly the kind of battle that Newman talks of. While Newman sees the importance of the individual in the greater Catholic scheme, here Sandy / Helena is being forced by the Church or convent hierarchy to meet those interested in her treatise

The other sisters remarked 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. But the dispensation was forced upon Sandy, and she clutched the bars and received the choice visitors, the psychologists and the Catholic seekers, the higher journalist ladies and the academics who wanted to question her

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<sup>18</sup> Ker, (1993) p.24.

<sup>19</sup> Montgomery (1997), p.95.

about her odd psychological treatise on the nature of moral perception, called 'The Transfiguration of the Commonplace'. (*Jean Brodie*, p.35)

The nature of the ruling seems authoritarian, and at odds with Newman's assertion that the 'Catholic Christendom is no simple exhibition of religious absolutism'.<sup>20</sup> However, this is an isolated example, and given that Sister Helena's treatise is concerned with moral perception, psychology, and the Romantic sounding 'Transfiguration of the Commonplace', it is apparent that her right to expression is not under any threat (*Jean Brodie*, p.35). The situation does, however, exemplify Benilde Montgomery's interpretation of Newman's words in his *Apologia*, where 'conversion, for him, neither concludes nor leads to simple peace or repose'.<sup>21</sup>

Variations on Newman's battle between authority and private judgement are present throughout *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie* in numerous non-religious contexts. The most entertaining of these is the gentle tussle going on between the young Sandy and Jenny and Miss Brodie over the fictional rights to her love life. 'The Mountain Eyrie by Sandy Stranger and Jenny Gray' (*Jean Brodie*, p.18) chronicles Miss Brodie's amorous exploits, as the girls write themselves into their teacher's life in the style of adventure literature. What becomes evident is that Jean Brodie is not the only one who attempts to influence the narratives of the other characters. Sandy and Jenny's innocent attempts to fictionalise their teacher's private life are in ironic contrast to Miss Brodie's attempts to predetermine her pupil's lives. Where Miss Brodie attempts to play God, her pupils fight back by employing their imaginations and rewriting the stories that Miss Brodie tells them.

'The Mountain Eyrie' (*Jean Brodie*, p.18) then, is the girl's unwitting rejection of Miss Brodie's narrative authority. It shows the nascent Romantic imagination in the young Sandy that will develop into her insight and interest in psychology, and it is in stark contrast to Miss Brodie's own fictionalising. Indeed it is worth considering whether 'The

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<sup>20</sup> Newman (1977), p.286.

<sup>21</sup> Montgomery (1997), p.95.

Mountain Eyrie' (*Jean Brodie*, p.18) is any less plausible a narrative than that of the deceased yet still evolving identity of Hugh Carruthers. It is this metamorphosis in Hugh's identity that alerts Sandy to Miss Brodie 'making her new love story fit the old' (*Jean Brodie*, p.72). Once Sandy realises that their fictions are based upon fictions, and that Miss Brodie is 'guilty of misconduct' (*Jean Brodie*, p.72), this spells the end of their early literary careers.

The novel's most notable inversion of authority comes in the form of Sandy's betrayal of Miss Brodie. The manner in which this happens can be seen within the patterning that Spark utilises elsewhere in the novel. We are told that while on holiday in Italy, Miss Brodie and some friends have an audience with the Pope. While her friends acknowledge the Pope's authority, Miss Brodie avoids doing so; 'My friends kissed his ring but I thought it proper only to bend over it' (*Jean Brodie*, p.44). This passing reference becomes significant later in the novel as Miss Brodie is attempting to discover her betrayer:

'Think, if you can, who it could have been. I must know which one of you betrayed me'

'Sandy replied like an enigmatic Pope: 'If you did not betray us it is impossible that you could have been betrayed by us. The word betrayed does not apply'.

*(Jean Brodie*, p.126)

Sandy has inverted the power that Miss Brodie refused earlier in the novel. She has the opportunity to confess that it was she (Sandy) who betrayed Miss Brodie, but invoking Miss Brodie's own Calvinistic self-absolution, she justifies to Miss Brodie her own reasons for betraying her whilst keeping the fact concealed. It is Spark's choice of the simile 'like an enigmatic Pope' (*Jean Brodie*, p.126) that connects back to Miss Brodie's story and alerts us to the inversion of power, that having refused the Papal authority, it now comes full circle in the form of the self-ordained Sandy, the enigmatic Pope, enforcing the authority Miss Brodie previously rejected.

Miss Brodie's authority as a teacher is constantly being called into question by Miss Mackay and the school authorities. Nonetheless, even after the girls have been in the upper school for some time, their collective identity is still that of the Brodie set. Newcomer Joyce Emily wants to join the group ironically because of their individualism:

It was the Brodie set to which Joyce Emily mostly desired to attach herself, perceiving their individualism; but they, less than anybody, wanted her. With the exception of Mary Macgregor, they were, in fact, among the brightest girls in the school, which was somewhat a stumbling block to Miss Mackay in her efforts to discredit Miss Brodie. (*Jean Brodie*, p.117)

This passage highlights a number of important points regarding the individual and authority. Joyce Emily sees the paradox inherent in the Brodie set; they stand out as a collective, yet it is their individuality which marks them as separate from the rest of the school. Miss Brodie's influence on the girls at this point (they are seventeen) is not as a teacher, but due to the fact that the girls 'had to admit, at last, and without doubt, that she was really an exciting woman as a woman' (*Jean Brodie*, p.116). Their paradoxical collective embrace of individuality is seen to go only so far however, as they have moved beyond Miss Brodie's singular teaching methods to become 'among the brightest girls in the school' (*Jean Brodie*, p.117). Having witnessed Miss Brodie's teaching methods, where '[a]ll of the Brodie set, save one, counted on its fingers, as had Miss Brodie, with accurate results more or less' (*Jean Brodie*, p.6), it is clear that the set have moved on and flourished under their upper school teachers.

Nevertheless, it is clear that Miss Brodie still has a powerful hold over the girls. While the subjects she introduced them to as young students may have been deemed 'irrelevant to the authorized curriculum [...] and useless to the school as a school' (*Jean Brodie*, p.5), it is this rejection of the school's academic authority that has kept the girls entranced by Miss Brodie. She was never successful as an academic teacher, but as a charismatic, magnetic personality who introduced her students to 'the Buchmanites and Mussolini, the Italian Renaissance painters, the advantages to the skin of cleansing cream'

(*Jean Brodie*, p.5), in other words, her own interests. It may have been the age at which Miss Brodie taught the girls, but it seems by the time they are set to leave school, she has not damaged their academic lives, and has been instrumental in greatly enhancing their cultural lives which would have been highly unlikely had she adhered to the influence of Miss Mackay, the curriculum, and the school's authority.

This tension between the individual and authority that is played out in the school has its roots in the Romantic self-fashioning and resultant self-absolution that develops out of the Romantic emphasis on the self. As outlined above, the untethering of reason from emotion, or intellect from imagination, leads to what F. R. Hart identifies as 'various forms of absurd self-assertion [...] diabolical forgeries of true individuality [...] generated by the romantic egoism that grew from Calvinism'.<sup>22</sup> This unchecked Romanticism leads to solipsism, and the solipsism that concerns Spark is filtered through the theme of vision in both its literal and metaphoric sense. We are alerted to this early in the novel when we are first introduced to Sandy, who was 'notorious for her small, almost non-existent eyes' (*Jean Brodie*, p.7), and by Miss Brodie, who says: 'Where there is no vision [...] the people perish' (*Jean Brodie*, p.7). The reference to Sandy's small eyes becomes a recurring motif throughout the novel. She peers at Miss Brodie 'through her tiny eyes' (*Jean Brodie*, p.11), and in an attempt to heighten her creative imagination we are told that 'Sandy screwed her eyes even smaller in the effort of seeing with her mind' (*Jean Brodie*, p.17). The last example illustrates Sandy utilising her youthful Romantic imagination, which manifests itself through her fictional account of Miss Brodie's love lives in 'The Mountain Eyrie' (*Jean Brodie*, p.18), co-written with Jenny, and in a series of imaginary encounters with literary figures such as Alan Breck, Mr Rochester and 'The Lady of Shallot'. As an adult her Romantic imagination is fused with her interest in psychology and theology to produce her 'Transfiguration of the Commonplace' (*Jean Brodie*, p.35). Indeed, Sandy's evolution from childhood daydreaming to psychological theology can be seen as an attempt (for

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<sup>22</sup> Hart (1978), p.303.

better or worse; we never discover its contents) to understand Coleridge's idea that the mind of man is made in God's image. Miss Brodie's notion of vision also relates to this transfigurational ability, but for her the sublime is attained through art – 'It lifts one up' (*Jean Brodie*, p.7), she says of Tennyson – while for Sandy, sublimity is only attainable through religion.

Miss Brodie professes to have great vision, and her love of pictorial art suggests someone with a keen artistic, interpretive and analytical eye. However, both literally and metaphorically Miss Brodie's vision is lacking. 'Pictorial art is my passion' (*Jean Brodie*, p.66) she says, despite misidentifying the Rossetti and Botticelli paintings (see Chapter 2). However, it is her religious vision that Spark is mostly concerned with, as Miss Brodie sees religion only in aesthetic terms, using gospel readings and religious art in the same way as she uses poetry and painting.

Miss Brodie is blinded by the light of her own ego, unable even to recognise herself in others. This solipsism is evident in her treatment of the other Calvinistic figures that haunt the Marcia Blaine School for Girls. On moving to the Senior School, we are told that the girls encounter a new type of teacher; 'Here were no gaunt mistresses like Miss Gaunt, those many who had stalked past Miss Brodie in the corridors saying 'good morning' with predestination in their smiles' (*Jean Brodie*, p.75). This recognition of a Calvinistic communality is beyond Miss Brodie's vision, as Margery Palmer McCulloch observes: 'Spark's characterisation does not involve Brodie in consciously acknowledging Calvinism as a spiritual home. On the contrary, some of her strongest animosity is directed against the narrow religious attitudes of Miss Gaunt and her naive disciples the Misses Kerr'.<sup>23</sup> Miss Brodie's solipsistic self-absolution from sin and election to grace results in her inability to see herself or to recognise her similarity to those she most resembles. This inability for self-analysis is damning, but it is Miss Brodie's lack of spiritual vision that is the main cause of her demise. Throughout the novel she comes face to face with religion, but fails to

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<sup>23</sup> McCulloch (1999), p.94.



acknowledge anything other than the aesthetic content, unable in her self-obsession to see the truth that Spark places within her sight.

Miss Brodie is not alone in exhibiting this paucity of vision. Miss Mackay spends much of the novel looking ‘for some piece of evidence which could be used to enforce Miss Brodie’s retirement’ (*Jean Brodie*, p.115). She is given it when Sandy tells her of Miss Brodie’s interest in fascism. Miss Mackay replies ‘What do you mean? I didn’t know she was attracted by politics’ (*Jean Brodie*, p.125). This comes as something of surprise given Miss Brodie’s fascist sympathies, and crucially, the fact that the walls of her classroom have been adorned with images of Mussolini and his fascist troops. Having spent the summer in Italy she tells the class ‘I have brought back a great many pictures which we can pin on the wall [...] Here is a larger formation of Mussolini’s fascisti, it is a better view of them than last year’s picture’ (*Jean Brodie*, p.44). So the images of Mussolini have been on the classroom walls for at least a year, and Miss Brodie is in the process of praising him just as Miss Mackay enters the classroom:

‘Mussolini is one of the greatest men in the world, far more so than Ramsay MacDonald, and his fascisti-’  
 ‘Good morning, Miss Brodie. Good morning, sit down, girls,’ said the headmistress who had entered in a hurry’. (*Jean Brodie*, p.44)

It is conceivable that Miss Mackay has paid no attention to the walls in Miss Brodie’s class, but given her desire to force Miss Brodie out, this is unlikely. If she is so convinced that Miss Brodie is unsuitable, then it reflects a distinct lack of oversight and vision on the part of Miss Mackay.

Teddy Lloyd also suffers from a lack of vision in his inability to paint portraits that do not resemble Miss Brodie. Reporting back to her old teacher, ‘Sandy had told Miss Brodie how peculiarly all his portraits reflected her. She had said so again and again, for Miss Brodie loved to hear it [...] ‘I am his Muse,’ said Miss Brodie. (*Jean Brodie*, p.120). His is a different kind of lack of vision; his fixation with her is such that his artistic vision

becomes narrow, seeing all his subjects only in terms of the object of his obsession, Miss Brodie. In many respects Lloyd and Brodie are the ideal partners for each other, as each complements the other perfectly. Lloyd has technique, evident in the fact that he ‘was preparing an exhibition, and was encouraged in this course by art critics’ (*Jean Brodie*, p.120), but is lacking in imaginative range, while Miss Brodie has the Romantic imagination but no artistic technique through which to channel it.

Returning to Sandy, it is clear from the repeated emphasis on her eyes that Sandy’s vision is of central symbolic importance. Miss Brodie says ‘You have got insight [...] you’re a deep one’, however, this recognition of Sandy’s ability to analyse and see beyond the surface is not a trait that endears her to some (*Jean Brodie*, p.107). Teddy Lloyd finds this disturbing, saying: ‘You’re too analytical and irritable for your age’ (*Jean Brodie*, p.123), and ‘[w]ould she kindly stop analysing his mind, it was unnatural in a girl of eighteen’ (*Jean Brodie*, p.122). It is somewhat ironic that Lloyd, who most depends on vision, senses that Sandy sees through him; that she sees him ‘through her little eyes, with the near black-mailing insolence of her knowledge’ (*Jean Brodie*, p.102). This gives us a foreshadowing of the Sandy who will become Sister Helena and go on to write her ‘odd psychological treatise on the nature of moral perception called ‘The Transfiguration of the Commonplace’’ (*Jean Brodie*, p.35).

Sandy’s analytical perception of people is not all that unsettles; simply being the subject of her gaze has the same effect, as this passage illustrates:

‘Sandy, I’ll swear you are short-sighted, the way you peer at people. You must get spectacles.’

‘I’m not,’ said Sandy irritably, ‘it only seems so’. (*Jean Brodie*, p.107)

However, most disturbing is the description of her eyes not just as small, but as resembling those of a pig. Another of Spark’s repeated motifs, it recurs throughout the novel. We are told of ‘Sandy’s little pig-like eyes’ (*Jean Brodie*, p.13), that she ‘fixed her little pig-like eyes on the ceiling’ (*Jean Brodie*, p.23), and of her looking at Miss Brodie ‘with her little

pig-like eyes' (*Jean Brodie*, p.66). Paddy Lyons states that the narration 'from time to time deliberately views Sandy from the outside, unflatteringly, dwelling repeatedly on the size of Sandy's eyes [...] as if to impute an ongoing poverty to Sandy's vision, a limitation of which Sandy herself could have no awareness'.<sup>24</sup> Yet we are witness to Sandy's insight, and her precocious ability to see beyond the surface of both Jean Brodie and Teddy Lloyd. Sandy's vision may be limited in certain respects – only God can see everything, is the message – but in comparison to the surrounding characters, Sandy's vision cannot be characterised as one of poverty.

There is another explanation for the focus on Sandy's eyes, and in particular the 'pig-like' refrain (*Jean Brodie*, p.13). Gerard Carruthers identifies a demonic subtext, where the depiction of Sandy's eyes has a Biblical referent: 'In the Gospels of Luke and Mark, Christ's driving out of one or more demons into the Gadarene swine confirms a long-standing cultural association between pigs and the Devil'.<sup>25</sup> Carruthers sees Sandy's affair with Lloyd as the moment when Jean Brodie's duplicity is transferred from teacher to pupil. Until this point, Miss Brodie has been the one possessed:

Duplicity is quite precisely also here part of the biblical subtext of the passages on the Gadarene swine, in which Christ interrogates the identity of the demon possessing a man, to which it replies, 'My name is Legion for we are many.' If Brodie might be read in her dubiety as rather demonic for much of the novel (at the beginning of Chapter 3 we are told 'there were legions of her kind'), it is as though the demon jumps into Sandy.<sup>26</sup>

Sandy subsequently loses interest in Lloyd, 'but was deeply absorbed in his mind, from which she extracted, among other things, his religion as a pith from a husk' (*Jean Brodie*, p.123). This is a central point in the novel as it leads to Sandy's conversion to Catholicism. However, as soon as this happens, 'we have a sudden change of metaphor where the

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<sup>24</sup> Lyons (2010), p.91.

<sup>25</sup> Gerard Carruthers, 'Muriel Spark as Catholic Novelist', in *The Edinburgh Companion to Muriel Spark*, ed. by Michael Gardiner and Willy Maley (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2010), pp.74-84 (p.78).

<sup>26</sup> Carruthers (2010), p.78. Carruthers quotes from *Jean Brodie*, p.42.

perspective shoots from husks lying on the ground to the heavens':<sup>27</sup> 'Her mind was as full of his religion as a night sky is full of things visible and invisible. She left the man and took his religion and became a nun in the course of time' (*Jean Brodie*, p.123). Alongside the Calvinism of Edinburgh and Miss Brodie, which she can now reject, Sandy's affair with Lloyd is the catalyst for her conversion. Carruthers points out that this trajectory of evil to good is part of a broader pattern, stating that '[t]hroughout Spark's oeuvre we find the characteristic Catholic gesture that good can come from evil, since God never allows the Devil definitively to win a soul before the hour of death'.<sup>28</sup> This is echoed by Flannery O'Connor, who states:

There is a moment in every great story in which the presence of grace can be felt as it waits to be accepted or rejected, even though the reader may not recognise this moment [...] From my own experience in trying to make stories "work," I have discovered that what is needed is an action that is totally unexpected, yet totally believable, and I have found that, for me, this is always an action which indicates that grace has been offered. And frequently it is an action in which the devil has been the unwilling instrument of grace [...] I have found, in short, from reading my own writing, that my subject in fiction is the action of grace in territory held largely by the devil.<sup>29</sup>

This corroborates Carruthers' reading, highlighting the way in which 'the devil has been the unwilling instrument of grace',<sup>30</sup> the result being that 'good can come from evil'<sup>31</sup> in an unforeseen manner. Sandy's 'little pig-like eyes' (*Jean Brodie*, p.66), and the use of 'legion' alert the reader to the biblical subtext, and while Sandy has taken an interest in Calvinism, her conversion to Catholicism can be seen as 'an action that is totally unexpected, yet totally believable'.<sup>32</sup> Given the novel's technique of disjointed linearity, it is darkly ironic that the reader knows of Sandy's conversion before she does. Nonetheless, O'Connor's insights into her own fictional methods and concerns reveal Carruthers'

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<sup>27</sup> Carruthers (2010), p.78.

<sup>28</sup> Carruthers (2010), p.78.

<sup>29</sup> O'Connor (1970), p.118.

<sup>30</sup> O'Connor (1970), p.118.

<sup>31</sup> Carruthers (2010), p.78.

<sup>32</sup> O'Connor (1970), p.118.

assertion of a wider Catholic characteristic to be entirely valid, and Francis Russell Hart's words in relation to *The Girls of Slender Means* accord with this:

Her false individualists are grotesquely unreal and at the same time diabolically alive: the extreme nominalist and the Catholic realist are at war. Diabolism, the shadow side of religious conviction, may seem a joke or a fraud, yet the secular Calvinist [...] knows that "a sense of Hell" and "a vision of evil" may effectively initiate salvation, that the religious visionary may well feel demon-possessed [...] Spark's Christian economy, in short, is a grotesque, demon-ridden one, where an ambiguous battle goes on between fraudulent romanticism bent on self-assertion, self-destruction, and a tyrannical moral collectivity that imposes discipline by blackmail.<sup>33</sup>

It is apparent from this quote that Spark's fiction contains recurring themes. Jean Brodie is Spark's archetypal 'false individualist', while Sandy comes to epitomise the 'religious visionary' who is 'demon-possessed', but who nonetheless comes to salvation.<sup>34</sup> While *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie* may not contain any of the regular cast of blackmailers that populate much of her fiction, it is a presence, as we are reminded of Sandy, 'with the near black-mailing insolence of her knowledge.' (*Jean Brodie*, p.102). Hart also sees the connection back to Romanticism and the birth of the modern self as central to Spark's attempts to find a balance between the fraudulent assertion of the self, and 'true individuality, which is found only through the self-surrender of the orthodox Christian'.<sup>35</sup>

The manner in which Spark relates actual to spiritual vision may seem too direct, but she subverts this in the way in which she invokes the use of the Devil and the negative description of Sandy's eyes to engender good. It renders the comparison between sight and insight troublesome, unexpected and complicated. Sandy's insight can also be seen in the tradition of Sparkian humour. As David Lodge notes, Sandy 'is the only character who is interiorised to any significant extent – the only character whose thoughts we share intimately'.<sup>36</sup> We are therefore given insight into the only character with insight. It is

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<sup>33</sup> Hart (1978), p.303. Hart quotes from Muriel Spark, *The Girls of Slender Means* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books Ltd, 1966), p.133 and p.140.

<sup>34</sup> Hart (1978), p.303.

<sup>35</sup> Hart (1978), p.303

<sup>36</sup> Lodge (1971), p.127.

another of Spark's jokes in the vein of Lise as an anagram of 'lies' in *The Driver's Seat*, and searching for a needle in a haystack in the story 'The Portobello Road'.

Before we dismiss Miss Brodie's lack of spiritual vision and her inability to see beyond herself and her immediate surroundings, it is worth remembering that as readers, Spark asks us to do the same; to see beyond the surface. This is tied to her belief that her novels are not truth, 'they are fiction, out of which a kind of truth emerges [...] There is metaphorical truth and moral truth, and what they call anagogical'.<sup>37</sup> This anagogical truth is '[t]he mystical, spiritual or hidden allegorical meaning of a text',<sup>38</sup> which in Spark's fiction works via 'a stratum of meanings, of which the surface is emblematic only, and which invites exploration'.<sup>39</sup> For Ruth Whittaker, the difficulty is that 'Mrs Spark withholds precise parallels so that it is impossible to interpret the internal symbolism'.<sup>40</sup> This difficulty in decoding Spark's symbolism is echoed by Valerie Shaw, who states that 'Spark uses the secular form of the novel to instruct her readers obliquely in the art of living well and simultaneously to convey deeply religious meanings through 'dark sayings''.<sup>41</sup> This dissertation has been an attempt to identify these oblique instructions and understand the deeply religious meanings in *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie*, to analyse and shed new light on Spark's novel and its treatment of Romanticism and the Romantic imagination.

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<sup>37</sup> Spark, in Kermode (1992), p.30.

<sup>38</sup> Gray (1992), p.22.

<sup>39</sup> Whittaker (1982), p.129.

<sup>40</sup> Whittaker (1982), p.129.

<sup>41</sup> Shaw (1987), p.278.

## Conclusion

From the moment that Jean Brodie outlines her belief that ‘Art comes first, and then science’ (*Jean Brodie*, p.25), the ideological divide between Romanticism and the Enlightenment-formed modern world of Edinburgh is evident in *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie*. Miss Brodie’s assertion of the supremacy of philosophy, art and religion over mathematics and science corresponds with the wider tension between emotion and reason throughout the novel, and is embodied in her various struggles with empiricism and authority. Throughout the novel, Miss Brodie’s bias is also evident in the various depictions of characters who encapsulate the persona of the Romantic artist. Miss Brodie sees herself partly as Romantic artist, and partly as muse to Teddy Lloyd (himself a damning portrayal of the modern Romantic artist). Her conception of the Romantic artist as embodied in Botticelli, Rossetti, Pavlova, and even Lloyd, is one where their status affords them the right to behave outwith the parameters of right and wrong, and it is in this respect that Miss Brodie’s Romantic and Calvinist tendencies converge.

The figure of Rossetti is central to Spark’s novel, and misconceptions surrounding the understanding of his accomplishments as an artist reflect Miss Brodie’s mistaken beliefs as to the role of the Romantic artist. David G. Riede states that the contemporary conception of Rossetti was that his ‘distinctive achievement, his most significant contribution to the art of his day, was the careful and minute recording of his own inner self, his own soul’.<sup>1</sup> However, Riede goes on to say that Rossetti ‘himself believed in the romantic idealisation of the artist and tried to live up to it, yet it is an impossible ideal, and he had in the end to live in the “real” world’.<sup>2</sup> Rossetti’s realisation of the impossibility of this ideal is in contrast to Miss Brodie’s inability to reconcile her own Romantic imaginings with the real world in which she lives. Rather than enhancing her understanding of her world, Miss Brodie’s Romantic imagination does not enable her to

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<sup>1</sup> David G. Riede, *Dante Gabriel Rossetti Revisited* (New York: Twaine Publishers, 1992), p.1.

<sup>2</sup> Riede (1992), p.14.

see beyond the immediate surface of her environment, rather it removes her from her everyday world with disastrous consequences. Sandy's childhood romantic fictionalising gives way to a more rational and analytical temperament as she divests herself of storytelling in an attempt to come to an understanding of truth, faith and the transfigurational qualities of her new found Catholic belief.

This Romantic notion of transfiguration is a recurring motif throughout. Miss Brodie's Romantic imagination and the resulting aesthetic self-elevation of her everyday life is the profane to Sandy / Helena's sacred 'Transfiguration of the Commonplace' (*Jean Brodie*, p.35). Both attempt to elevate their everyday existence, whether through art or religion, and in this we see Spark engaging directly with Romanticism.

Spark's study of Mary Shelley, *Child Of Light*, is now correctly regarded as an important work of criticism, and a book that elucidates Spark's own writing. It reveals her profound understanding of the Romantic concerns of the time, and the powerful influence that Shelley and *Frankenstein* in particular have exerted on her own writing. The most important aspect of *Child Of Light* is Spark's identification of the dangers when reason and emotion become detached, and when unchecked Romantic tendencies lead to solipsism. *Child Of Light* also reveals that, while *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie* is part of an identifiably Scottish literary tradition, the influence of *Frankenstein* and Romanticism are of equal and previously overlooked importance.

Spark's use of modernist literary techniques to encapsulate the themes of predestination and Romantic self-assertion can be read as a rejection of the Romantic in favour of a modern or postmodern worldview. However, this overlooks Spark's methodology of presenting oppositions and leaving the subsequent tensions unresolved. In doing so she enacts the 'perfect balance of imaginative and rational faculties' (*Child Of Light*, p.138) that she outlines in *Child Of Light*, and in *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie* she illustrates the potential risks that occur when this precarious equilibrium is destabilised.

Her investigation of authority grows out of the dangers of the Romantic sensibility, and is informed by her belief that God is the ultimate authority. For Spark, the fundamental issue scrutinised in *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie* is encapsulated in Miss Brodie, who



lacks the vision to recognise God as the ultimate authority, and who mistakenly sees religion, and Catholicism in particular, as oppositional to the self. F. R. Hart sums this up, stating that for Spark,

[w]hen divine messages are neglected, the effect is a loss of reality, or that inverse side of sacramentalism, the anarchic flowering of individuality. To Spark, normalising Catholicism means a spiritual discipline that assures the reality of the self and of the external world.<sup>3</sup>

As a Catholic believer, Spark sees the emphasis on the self as misdirected, that solipsism and the internal machinations of the modern ego have their roots in the Romantic conception of the individual which denies the centrality of God in favour of the centrality of the self. The egotistic elements of Romanticism and Calvinism that Hart identifies are interrogated through her use of the author-God analogy, and the paradox of fascism has its echo in the collective individuality of her girls.

While Spark outlines the dangers that result from the unrestrained Romantic sensibility, throughout *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie* the powerful draw of Romanticism is evident in the numerous allusions to Romantic works of art and literature. On the evidence of *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie*, Romanticism fascinates Spark, and arguably seems to inspire her, yet she rejects the egocentric aspects that clash with her Catholic beliefs. However, aspects of Romanticism can be seen throughout her fiction. This, combined with the complicated and multi-faceted relationship with Romanticism and the Romantic imagination depicted in *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie*, requires further study, and her treatment of Romanticism throughout her wider oeuvre will be the focus of my Doctoral studies.

Spark's debt to John Henry Newman as both a theologian and a writer also requires more thorough investigation. Spark has stated that her conversion to Catholicism was the single most important factor in her becoming a fiction writer, and Newman was central to

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<sup>3</sup> Hart (1978), p.300.

this. I will contend that her theological education and her literary criticism are not disparate concerns, but rather two closely interrelated and often overlapping paths. This is evidenced in *Loitering With Intent*, where Fleur states that ‘Newman is a nineteenth century Romantic’.<sup>4</sup> Such an inter-relation is also identified by Stephen Prickett, who states that ‘Anyone who has read both literary criticism and theology in the [late Romantic / early Victorian] period soon comes to realise how deeply the two are intertwined’.<sup>5</sup> This overlooked area of convergence will also be a central focus of my PhD.

Spark’s writing in *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie* plays out the conflict that occurs when Romantic ideologies come into contact with religious belief in a postmodern context. The outcomes are equivocal, and for this reason demand further in-depth study. However, this is undertaken in the knowledge that the attempt to decode Spark’s writing is likely to leave ‘us, like Job, with a renewed sense of mystery’,<sup>6</sup> for as Miss Brodie points out, ‘[n]othing infuriates people more than their own lack of spiritual insight’ (*Jean Brodie*, pp.106-107).

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<sup>4</sup> Muriel Spark, *Loitering With Intent* (London: Triad/Granada, 1982), p.70.

<sup>5</sup> Prickett (1976), p.7.

<sup>6</sup> O’Connor (1970), p.184.

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