

Sandy's Narrativization of Miss Brodie and the Narrator's Collusion: *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie* as an Anti-Fascist Text

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I. Introduction

The title of Muriel Spark's *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie* is perhaps a misleading one. The reader naturally assumes that the main protagonist of the work will be Jean Brodie. While *Prime* does revolve around Miss Brodie and her years at the Marcia Blaine School for Girls in Edinburgh, a closer examination reveals that Miss Brodie functions as the main object of narrativization within the work rather than as a narrating subject. Miss Brodie's story is conveyed mostly through Sandy Stranger's perception, and Miss Brodie's "name and memory" flits "from mouth to mouth like swallows in the summer" (136) throughout the work. Although the main narrative of *Prime* is of Miss Brodie's abuse of authority and her consequent betrayal by "one of her own girls" (134), the power of her "irresponsible egotism" (Lodge 248) is paradoxically undermined as she herself does not have control over how her story is told. By utilizing a narrator that authorizes Sandy's perception of Miss Brodie, Spark aims to expose how a narrative that dismantles abusive authority can in fact be oppressive.

Judy Suh argues that *Prime* exposes "fascism's revolutionary appearance within a modern liberal democratic context" (94). She argues against "emphasizing Miss Brodie's culpability in abusing her authoritative position" and instead focuses on the fascist tendency to bind the "deterritorializing desires" of modern women that sought escape from patriarchal society to "reterritorializing forces" (92) that claimed could create "new modes of

autonomy for women” (99) within “large-scale institutions such as the state, nation, and Empire” (95). Theodor Adorno points out that “fascist agitation is centered in the idea of the leader,” a “psychological image” (124) that allows the fascist community to idealize and identify itself with the “superman” (127) demagogue. According to Adorno, fascist masses take on the irrational and often violent aspect of the “primal herd” (122) *despite* its irrationality because the fascist leader manipulates and gratifies the followers’ narcissistic wishes to simultaneously “submit to authority and to be the authority himself” (127). Both Suh and Adorno thus emphasize that the relationship between the fascist demagogue and the fascist follower is not a binary one in which the authority figure wields absolute control, but is reciprocal in that the follower participates in creating the “modern leader image” (Adorno 125) through his own desires. If, as Suh argues, the Brodie set can be seen as a site of “microfascism,” (91) it becomes possible to read *Prime* as an anti-fascist narrative as the text simultaneously works *toward* a narrative of the consequences of abusing authority over a community, and *against* this narrative by exposing the desires and participation of the follower through the distancing of the narrator and authorial intent.

Although Suh also reads *Prime* as an anti-fascist narrative, she focuses on the character of Miss Brodie and her desires to “deterritorialize” from the stifling authoritative and conservative school system and “reterritorialize” herself and her set on modes of feminist empowerment and progressive educational policies. However, perceiving Miss Brodie as a “storyteller” who “recklessly orchestrates the girls’ beginnings and endings” (88) fails to take into full consideration that Miss Brodie does not have an authorial voice within the text. Miss Brodie is instead narrativized mainly through Sandy’s gaze, and it is because the narrator relies heavily on Sandy’s perspective and colludes with her narrativization through narrative techniques that Sandy appears as a the “moral reference point for the reader” (Pullin 85). However, despite her own assertions of her “insight” and the narrator’s collusion, Sandy’s narrativization of Miss Brodie becomes unreliable when the reader is able to detect an ironic distance between Spark, the author, and the narrator. Many critics have pointed out the difficulty in defining the narrator in *Prime*,

and Robert Peter Brown in particular illuminates the questionable ethical orientations of the narrator that indicate an ironic distance between author and narrator. Although both Sandy and the narrator strive to confine Miss Brodie as the authority figure within a narrative of abusive authority, their efforts ultimately fail as the irony employed by the author reveals not only the occluded desires and participation of the follower, but also the narrative techniques used by the narrator to collude with the follower's narrativization. This paper will focus on Sandy's gaze and the narrator's collusion, and the dismantling effects of authorial irony in an attempt to read the work as an anti-fascist text.

II. Sandy's Authoritative Gaze and her Narrativization of Miss Brodie

Miss Brodie is a central figure of glamour and controversy within the Marcia Blaine School for Girls, yet the reader soon perceives that Miss Brodie appears within the text only in the form of a surface representation. David Lodge refers to Miss Brodie as "a puzzle, an enigma" (243), and Hope Howell Hodgkins observes that Miss Brodie functions as a "perceived object" (528). It is virtually impossible to grasp her interior thoughts, and as Hodgkins accurately explicates, Miss Brodie is represented via her exterior "style" (525), in other words, through her speech, clothes and appearance, and details of her mannerisms. Representation through external appearances indicate an observing subject, and it is Sandy Stranger, the girl notorious for her "small, almost nonexistent, eyes" (3) who functions within the work as the main observer. Lodge points out that as Sandy "is the only character who is interiorized to any significant extent" (242), she naturally becomes the reader's "point of reference" (243) in assessing Miss Brodie. The narrator of *Prime* rarely provides narration of the teacher separate from Sandy's external observations, and this is the main reason as to why the reader is continuously aware of a distance between himself and Miss Brodie's interiority.

Miss Brodie then, is presented in the work as an object of observation, the object that *Prime* revolves around, but who herself does not narrate. The

narrator's general reticence to provide an alternate perspective into Miss Brodie's interior reinforces the narrator's privileging of Sandy's gaze and her objectification of Miss Brodie. It is Sandy who constantly watches Miss Brodie, as readers become well aware through the repetition of paragraphs ending with sentences such as "[h]er [Sandy's] little eyes looked at Miss Brodie in a slightly smaller way" (49), ". . . said Sandy, photographing this new Miss Brodie with her little eyes" (55), or "Sandy took her eyes from the hills" (59). Sandy is later praised by Miss Brodie as having "insight," and Teddy Lloyd, the art master, also remarks on her "unnatural" (131) penchant to analyze minds. Sandy's developed powers of observation and analysis serve her well in her narrativization of Miss Brodie, and she proceeds throughout her childhood to observe her teacher and her actions and create stories pertaining to her observations.

Sandy is in fact a master "author," even as a child she composes fictions based on real-life characters and events, as well as fictional characters borrowed from novels such as *Jane Eyre* and *Kidnapped*. Her earliest story introduced in *Prime* titled "The Mountain Eyrie" is co-authored with Jenny Gray, also a member of the Brodie set, and traces the conflicted interactions between the two girls and Hugh Carruthers, Miss Brodie's ex-lover who had been killed in the Great War. More stories follow, in which Sandy successively appears as heroine opposite both fictional and real-life characters such as the Lady of Shalott, Mr. Rochester, Anna Pavlova, and a local policewoman. Her stories culminates in a final letter "written" by Miss Brodie in a series of love correspondence between Miss Brodie and Gordon Lowther, the singing master, in which Sandy and Jenny take pains to "present Miss Brodie in both a favourable and an unfavourable light" (76) in regards to her affair with Lowther. Most of Sandy's fictions in fact, revolve around Miss Brodie and her love life, and it is important to note that while Sandy's stories concerning Miss Brodie are indeed "fictions," they have their basis in Sandy's watchful observations of her teacher. The love letter that the girls write is illuminating not only because it "combines the language of high romance with the sexual terminology of newspaper court reports" (Lodge 247), but because both the material and language of the fantasy derive from what the girls, and Sandy

in particular, has observed about Miss Brodie. References to Anna Pavlova, one of Miss Brodie's idols, a visible disdain of "ignorance of culture and the Italian scene" (77), and even a direct quote of Miss Brodie when she declares that were she to "receive a proposal of marriage tomorrow from the Lord Lyon King of Arms I [Miss Brodie] would decline it" (78) within the letter imply that Sandy's "fiction" is a restructuring of what she has seen and heard into a coherent narrative. Ironically, this "method of making patterns with facts" (76) is a technique that Sandy has picked up from Miss Brodie herself, a habit that has been developed and cultivated through Sandy's emulation and consequent mimesis of her teacher.

Although Sandy's fictions of Miss Brodie cease with the final letter that the girls bury in a cave by the sea, she continues to objectify and narrativize Miss Brodie. Sandy's perception of Miss Brodie undergoes changes as the girls grow into adolescence, from a Miss Brodie "hardly of flesh and blood" (55) who is "above" (18) the realm of sexual intercourse, to a Miss Brodie "capable of being kissed and of kissing" (55), and moves on to "imagine Miss Brodie sleeping with Mr. Lowther" (64). Sandy at thirteen wonders if Miss Brodie "might be physically beautiful and desirable to men" (91) and concludes at the age of seventeen "at last, without doubt, that she was really an exciting woman as a woman" (124). Even when taking into account the narrator's assertion that Miss Brodie was "still in a state of fluctuating development" (45), the fact that Sandy's perception of Miss Brodie changes according to her own growing knowledge of sex indicates that Sandy's narrativization has more to do with Sandy's own desires to perceive Miss Brodie than what Miss Brodie is actually like.

Sandy's objectification of Miss Brodie is particularly illuminated in her metaphorical allusions to her teacher. Through their walk across the Old Town of Edinburgh, Sandy "looks back" at Miss Brodie and the girls of her set and "understood them as a body with Miss Brodie for the head" (30). Lodge points out that the passage conceals a "religious metaphor" (250) in which Miss Brodie represents Christ. Because the narrator relies mostly on Sandy's perceptions in the girls' walk through the Old Town, readers are also forced to rely on Sandy's gaze in order to follow through the unraveling scene.

The reader also perceives of Miss Brodie in terms of metaphors, and she is reduced and contained within Sandy's metaphorical language of Calvinism as the authority figure of the group, in which Sandy and her companions, including the physically absent Jenny, are in "unified compliance to the destiny of Miss Brodie, as if God had willed them to birth for that purpose" (30). Sandy continues to contain Miss Brodie in her linguistic prison; when the girls encounter a group of Girl Guides Sandy recalls her teacher's picture of Mussolini's troops and her admiration of the "straightest of files," and immediately imagines that "the Brodie set was Miss Brodie's fascisti . . . all knit together for her need in another way" (31). The narrator closely details Sandy's metaphoric impressions, and readers are accordingly invited to perceive of Miss Brodie in turn as a Calvinistic God and a leader of fascisti who wields control over the destiny of her group of girls.

Even as Sandy grows into her ability for "insight" she continues to term Miss Brodie in metaphorical phrases such as "Providence" and "the God of Calvin" (129). Sandy's penchant for metaphors in her perception of her teacher is intertwined with her desires to objectify and narrativize Miss Brodie as a powerful figure of authority, one that greatly influences the destinies of the girls of her set. It is telling that in the moments of Sandy's metaphorical allusions to Miss Brodie during their trek across the Old Town, Sandy perceives of these moments as a sort of frightening revelation, in which she is seized with "group-fright" (31) and becomes frightened of the consequences of going against Miss Brodie's authority. There is a paradox here, as the allusions to a Calvinistic God and fascisti are metaphors of Sandy's creation, yet she takes fright at the authority that she herself has invested in Miss Brodie. Once we understand this paradox, we are able to see more clearly into the desires of Sandy; namely, that she desires to narrativize Miss Brodie as an all-powerful authority figure and herself as the frightened and powerless follower of Miss Brodie's group.

Because readers are led to rely mostly on Sandy's gaze throughout the work, it is not difficult for readers to readily accept Sandy's narrativization of Miss Brodie. Miss Brodie undoubtedly tries to manipulate the Brodie set according to her own motivations, and her abuse of authority over her girls

culminates disastrously in the death of Joyce Emily when she encourages the girl to participate in the Spanish Civil War. However, one must remember that this manipulation is perceived through the lens of Sandy's gaze and buttressed by the narrator. While Miss Brodie's charismatic and destructive power must also be closely examined to fully understand the complex mechanisms working in a fascist community, I intend to focus more on Sandy's narrativization of Miss Brodie that places herself as the follower and also the victim of Miss Brodie's abusive authority.

III. The Binary Leader-Follower Ideology of the Fascist Follower

Paul Morrison argues that fascism "provides the illusion of collective experience through aesthetic means" (6-7) and that the "fascist aestheticization of the political involves a compensatory access to representation or expression" (7) for the fascist follower. He points to the aesthetics of the mass rally, *sabato fascista*, as examples of the representation of an imagined collective, an "alternative to the alienation and fragmentation" (9) of modern society. Morrison's analysis of fascism's aestheticization of the political highlights the representational aspect of fascism. Adorno remarks that the basic tenet of the fascist follower's psychology is the "formation of the imagery of an omnipotent and unbridled father figure...apt to be enlarged into a 'group ego'" (124). There is a similarity between Morrison's and Adorno's argument in that both critics focus on modes of representation utilized by fascist followers. In this light, Sandy's representation of Miss Brodie may be perceived as Sandy's exercising of her "right to representation" (Morrison 8) guaranteed in fascism. Hodgkins has explicated in length concerning the aesthetic objectification of Miss Brodie in the descriptions of the teacher's apparel and style in *Prime*. Not only is Miss Brodie presented as an object of aesthetic viewing and consumption for the girls of her set and her lovers, she is also presented throughout the text as emblems or images of authority; even as Sandy misleads her teacher in her ideas of Rose Miss Brodie is still referred to in succession as "the leader of the set," "a Roman matron," and "an educational reformer" (118). The representation of Miss Brodie in *Prime* is thus not only aesthetic but also

reductive and containing; this fascist aspect shows through most clearly in Lloyd's portraits of Miss Brodie's girls, in which Sandy is unable to "obliterate her [Miss Brodie's] image" (129) from the individual images the girls. Sandy thus describes Miss Brodie in terms of aesthetic representation, an overbearing image that must be erased from Lloyd's canvases in order for the girls to gain their respective individualism. As Sandy visits Lloyd's studio for the last time after she has betrayed Miss Brodie, she again studies the girls' portraits and reflects that "she had failed to put a stop to Miss Brodie" (134).

If we are able to understand that Sandy utilizes methods of representation that bear a strong resemblance to a fascist follower's modes of representation of the fascist leader and community, then we are able to logically assume that Sandy's narrativization of Miss Brodie may also be perceived in the light of fascism. Sandy's desire to perceive Miss Brodie as authoritarian leads her to employ modes of aesthetic and linguistic/metaphoric representation that contain Miss Brodie and herself in a binary logic of the fascist demagogue and follower. This divide that confines Miss Brodie into a static emblem of authority automatically guarantees Sandy the place of the follower. The narrativization of Sandy then, is based on a binary ideology that clearly segregates the role of the authoritarian leader and follower within the group.

Even moments in which Sandy perceives of Miss Brodie as "fragile" and "silly" (118) work towards an overall process of narrativizing Miss Brodie as an authoritarian figure. Adorno points out that "the fascist leader's startling symptoms of inferiority" are paradoxically necessary for the fascist follower's "narcissistic identification" (127) with the leader. Musing on how Miss Brodie is being misled in her ideas of Rose, Sandy compares Miss Brodie's transfigured features to a "dark heavy Edinburgh" that suddenly changes into "a floating city when the light was a special pearly white and fell upon one of the gracefully fashioned streets" (118). The moment in which Miss Brodie's mistake concerning Rose is most starkly revealed is contained within Sandy's metaphor of Edinburgh, and it is when Miss Brodie appears "ridiculous" (131) that Sandy finds her teacher invested with a kind of pure and naïve beauty. As I have discussed in the above, modes of aesthetic and metaphoric representation is crucial for the fascist follower to perceive of, and identify

with, the leader of the group as an all-powerful figure of authority. In this light, Sandy's use of metaphor even during Miss Brodie's moments of human fallibility reveals the subtle mechanism in which modes of representation is appropriated by the fascist follower to paradoxically invest the leader with authority just when that authoritarian figure appears most vulnerable.

What is tricky about *Prime*, however, is that it is not only Sandy who narrativizes Miss Brodie in the context of a binary leader-follower ideology. The narrator of the work colludes with Sandy through narrative techniques. Susan Snaider Lanser argues that the reader must "not only read manifest 'content' but to read the content of manifest 'form'" (13), emphasizing that the form of the narrative is utilized to construct acceptable and unacceptable ideologies within the novel. Lanser remarks that "the ways in which narrators represent themselves, the relationships they construct with narratees, and the ideological and affective positions they take are dynamic and interdependent elements" (13), thus, the narrative voice becomes "a site of crisis, contradiction, or challenge" (7). Viewed in such a context, it becomes imperative to examine the narrator and his techniques in order to understand the ideology of the fascist follower that is privileged in *Prime*. And through investigating the narrator can the reader perceive a distance between the author herself and the authoritative narrator.

IV. The Narrator and his Collusion in Sandy's Narrativization

Brown convincingly argues that the narrator of *Prime* possesses limited "epistemic authority" (231) and can be "characterized as fallible, even unreliable" (233). His argument goes against traditional criticism of *Prime* that usually classified the narrator of the work as omniscient, such as in the analyses of Lodge and Ruth Whittaker. His detailed classification of *Prime*'s narrator as "heterodiegetic" and "extradiegetic" (232) allows us to take into consideration not only moments of qualified knowledge on part of the narrator, but also the narrator's ethical and moral orientations. According to Brown, it is moments when Mary Macgregor, the scapegoat of the Brodie set, is described within the work that the narrator betrays his ethical leanings.

The narrator's attitude towards Mary is in fact very similar to Sandy's and those of the Brodie set who perceive of Mary as "a nobody whom everyone can blame" (4). Sandy's perception of Mary as "officially the faulty one" (30) within the group is not unrelated to how the narrator frames Mary's death as a consequence of her own stupidity by implying a parallel between the scene of her death when she "ran one way; then, turning, the other way; and at either end the blast furnace of the fire met her" (14), and a scene in the science room in which Mary is reprimanded for her stupidity when she "ran along a single lane between two benches, met with a white flame, and ran back to meet another brilliant tongue of fire" (81). The narrator participates in the "victimization" (Brown 240) of Mary through narrative techniques, and this reduction by the narrator of Mary's character as the stupid scapegoat is a reflection of how the Brodie set reduces Mary to a "function" (Brown 241) within the group.

Brown points out that the narrator's treatment of Mary indicates that the distance between the narrator and the characters of the work is not as distant as it first appears (234). It becomes possible then, to surmise that there is an ironic distance between the author and the "fallible" (233) narrator. Lanser remarks that an "authorial" (16) narrator does not imply "an ontological equivalence between narrator and author" (16). If the reader is able to apprehend that the author is indeed ironic in her attitude toward the narrator, not only is the narrative authority of the narrator in *Prime*, but also Sandy's narrativization of Brodie, undermined. And as I have discussed above, Sandy's narrativization premises a binary divide between the authoritarian leader and follower, an ideological premise that the narrator accepts and disseminates within *Prime* in his collusion with Sandy. Undermining Sandy's narrativization and the narrator's collusion ultimately dismantles the binary schematic of leader and follower, and further reveals the complicated relationship within fascist communities, in which not only the leader exercises authority over the group, but also the follower invests authority in the leader and participates in the leader's power.

V. Reading Narrative Techniques as Irony

Paul De Man defines the concept of irony as “the permanent parabasis of the allegory of tropes” (179). Parabasis is “the interruption of a discourse by a shift in the rhetorical register” (178), in other words, coherent meaning created and conveyed to the reader by the narrative, and further, the concept of coherent meaning, or “allegory,” within a narrative is interrupted through an intrusion of different temporal and narrative dimensions. Irony then, as Brown indicates, does not simply imply a distance between subjects via different levels of knowledge, with the reader in on the know through his superior position as one who may “read” the author’s intent. Rather, irony undoes this assumption of the reader’s superiority because it works as an infinitely deferred interruption that unsettles “the basis of any narration” (181). It is an “absolute infinite negativity” (166), because in the end it is impossible to “know,” without a doubt, when the text is being ironic, and these doubts unravel meanings constructed by the narrative. Questions of whether or not a character, narrator, or author is being ironic inevitably call forth another question, in an “infinite chain of solvents” (166). Irony is thus “always the irony of understanding” (166), an unraveling of knowledge and narrative.

De Man’s theory of irony is especially illuminating in reading *Prime*. Spark’s work is unsettling because the reader’s understanding of the author’s irony is always deferred; a scene continues after pages of digression, often picking up the thread of narrative with a repetition of the same scene, in which the reader has been armed with new knowledge of the scenes through the preceding temporal and spatial digressions, only to receive new information later in the narrative that dismantles or adds to the reader’s previous knowledge. The first scene of *Prime* of when the girls are sixteen years old, in fact, picks up almost towards the end of the novel, in which Miss Brodie’s claim of “[t]hese years are still the years of my prime,” and the narrator’s remark, “[t]he Brodie set smiled in understanding of various kinds” (6) at the start of the work have taken on new dimensions of meaning. The last scene of *Prime* sums up this infinite deferral of understanding. The story reverts to a

scene that has already “taken place” in *Prime*, when Sandy, now Sister Helena of the Transfiguration, is visited by a nameless young man at her convent. To his question of what her biggest influence was during her adolescence, Sandy enigmatically answers, “[b]ut there was a Miss Jean Brodie in her prime” (35), and this scene is again repeated at the very end of the novel. The work ends with the repetition of Sandy’s answer, and her words have acquired a wealth of meaning that had not been apparent to readers during the novel’s first portrayal of the scene. However, the reader by no means understands fully the meaning of Sandy’s words even at the close of the work, as the diverse speculation of critics concerning the issue attests. The repetition of the scene renders no final, complete knowledge, even as it presents new levels of meaning. Spark’s work is ironic not only due to disparate levels of knowledge between characters, or between characters and narrator, but because the narrative itself questions and undoes the validity of the reader’s complete knowledge of the narrative.

Lodge remarks on the unsettling aspect of *Prime*, pointing out that the flash-forward technique “unsettle[s], rather than confirm[s], the reader’s ongoing interpretation of events, constantly readjusting the points of emphasis and the principle of suspense in the narrative” (238). Although he focuses on the specific narrative technique of flash-forwarding as the main reason behind the work’s disturbing nature, his observation is nevertheless illuminating because it allows us to read narrative techniques as irony. According to Lodge, flash-forwards act as interruptions in the reader’s “interpretation” of the narrative, and once the reader perceives of this technique as the parabasis of narrative rather than a manifestation of the authority of an omniscient narrator, it becomes possible to see narrative strategies within *Prime* in an ironic light. De Man argues that irony demystifies the “total arbitrariness” (181) and “performative” (176) aspect inherent in the structure of narration. In other words, narrative techniques are exposed as a strategic system that the narrator (or author-narrator) utilizes in order to construct the coherent and meaningful world of the novel. Lanser argues that as “the reception of a novel rests on an implicit set of principles by which textual events are rendered plausible,” the narrator (or author-narrator) must construct

“maxims” and “‘maxim-ize’ their narratives” (17). Irony undermines this structure of “maxims” because it reveals that ideologies posited within a text are in fact an arbitrary construct built by the narrator through a strategic system of narrative techniques. Although Lanser is mainly referring to patriarchal and feminist ideologies embedded within works of literature, her argument applies to any dominant or privileged ideologies in texts. Narrative techniques in *Prime*, then, can be perceived as a strategy on the part of the narrator to privilege the binary leader-follower ideology inherent in Sandy's narrativization of Miss Brodie. Reading the narrator's narrative strategy as irony exposes this fascist ideology as fundamentally arbitrary and performative, rather than as a given truth. I have discussed earlier that the narrator of *Prime* colludes in Sandy's narrativization. I will now propose to read the narrator's narrative strategy as irony to expose in detail how the narrator utilizes narrative techniques to collude with Sandy and legitimize the leader-follower ideology.

First, the narrator of *Prime* relies heavily on what Gerald Prince terms as the “disnarrated” (299) throughout the work in order to collude with Sandy. According to Prince, the disnarrated refers to “terms, phrases, and passages that consider what did not or does not place” (229). He includes “alethic expressions of impossibility or unrealized possibility,” “purely imagined worlds, desired worlds, or intended worlds, unfulfilled expectations, unwarranted beliefs, failed attempts” (299-300) in the category, all of which to some extent plays a part in the narrative of *Prime*. It is not only Miss Brodie, but also the narrator who is “obsessed” (*Prime* 128) with what does not actually take place, and at the heart of the novel revolves around the unfulfilled idea that Rose Stanley, who is “famous for sex” (3), becomes the lover of Lloyd in replacement of Miss Brodie. The narrator repetitively refers to Rose in terms of her supposed sex-instinct; whether she truly possesses such an instinct is not of much importance to the narrator. At the age of eleven Rose is referred as “who had *not yet* won her reputation for sex” (27 my emphasis), and when it becomes clear that Rose actually “had no curiosity about sex at all” (58), the narrator glosses over this fact by stating that “her magnificently appealing qualities” (57) lay in her complete disinterest in

the subject. Prince argues that the disnarrated “insists upon the ability to conceive and manipulate hypothetical worlds” (302). The “hypothetical world” of Miss Brodie’s prophecy appears continuously throughout the text to possess the potential of fulfillment, even when her predictions have already been unraveled; the narrator remarks that Miss Brodie was “cultivating Rose” and “questioning Sandy” in the “progress of the great love affair presently to take place between Rose and the art master” (126). Through the disnarrated, the narrator reinforces Miss Brodie’s authority to predict and create, in other words, *narrate*, a false reality that deceptively appears prophetic—a world of “unrealized possibility.” The reader is implicated by the narrator to perceive of Miss Brodie’s disnarrated prediction of Rose’s future in the same way that Sandy perceives the influence of her teacher, as a potentially threatening force that may at any time bulldoze the nascent individualism of the girls into “one big Miss Brodie” (109).

Second, the narrator goes against a linear time scheme, in which the narrative builds up towards the climax of an action by presenting in a consistent time frame the events that lead to the climax. In other words, motivations are first presented in the narrative, then the climatic action. However, the narrator of *Prime* works in reverse; first, establishing Miss Brodie’s betrayal (26), then revealing the betrayer (63), finally implying, but never revealing, the motivations behind Sandy’s action (100). Jonathan Culler convincingly argues that narratology “posit[s] the priority of events to the discourse which reports or presents them” which “the functioning narratives often subverts by presenting events not as givens but as the products of discursive forces or requirements” (119). According to Culler, the “crucial event” is also the “product of demands of signification” (121) as well as the effect of prior events, meaning, climatic action is imbued with meaning not only because a character’s motivations led up to the event, but also because the necessity of a “coherent, noncontradictory account of narrative” (122) requires the reader to give meaning to the action. In other words, motivations of a character may be reconstructed by the reader so that “events are justified by their appropriateness to thematic structure” (124).

In light of Culler’s argument, we may perceive that the narrator’s reversal

of the “priority of events to the discourse” in *Prime* functions to establish Sandy's betrayal as thematically inevitable. It is telling to note that Sandy's motivations for betraying Miss Brodie are never clearly explicated within the work, but only alluded to; the narrator remarks Sandy “was moved by various other considerations to betray Miss Brodie” (100). Although critics such as Lodge and Faith Pullin have argued that Sandy betrays Miss Brodie for “casting herself [Miss Brodie] as author and heroine of her own myth” (Pullin 90-91), such arguments are based on “a structure of signification” (122) in *Prime* that demands a meaningful and thematically coherent explanation for Sandy's action. In other words, the narrator structures the narrative so that Sandy's betrayal is perceived by the reader as an inevitable event, and because it is inevitable, the reader is led to reconstruct Sandy's motivations, despite the fact that she herself never truly reveals as to what specifically motivates her.

This narrative strategy of *Prime*'s narrator is in fact evocative of what Suh refers to as “fascism's violations” that “attempt to usurp human unpredictability in the quest to narrate beginnings and ends” (100-101). There is an inherent inevitability in the narratives of fascism that seeks to foretell and contain the destinies of the individuals of a fascist community, and this aspect of fascism has also been pointed out by Julie Gottlieb in her explication of the ideology of feminine fascism.¹⁾ The destinies of Miss Brodie and her set have already been laid out from the beginning of the novel, and when, as the narrator remarks, “the time came for her [Sandy] to betray Miss Brodie” (108), the reader is implicated by the narrator to provide the thematically logical answer as to why Sandy does so.

Reading narrative techniques in *Prime* as ironic thus demystifies the “total arbitrariness” (De Man 181) of the narration, and exposes the strategic structure of narrative designed to render the binary leader-follower ideology of the fascist follower that premises Sandy's narrativization as plausible within the work. Not only is Sandy's narrativization of Miss Brodie, but also the

1) In her work, *Feminine Fascism: Women in Britain's Fascist Movement: 1923-1945*, Julie Gottlieb explicates how the fascist movement in Britain appropriated and utilized feminist ideology and its narrative structure for its own purposes.

narrator's seeming authority undermined in his narrative collusion to Sandy. And because the narrator implicates the reader in his narrative strategies, Spark also exposes the reader's participation in creating and fortifying the leader-follower ideology.

As I have discussed in the above, a gap, or space appears within the narrative when it comes to inscribing Sandy's motivations for betrayal, a gap that is filled in by "discursive forces" (Culler 119). If however, we take into consideration Sandy's desires to narrativize Miss Brodie, we are provided with a means to re-inscribe this gap. Sandy receives a shock when she realizes "all at once" that Miss Brodie "means" (128) her predictions of Rose and Lloyd to come true, and proceeds to reflect on the its implications:

"From what you tell me I should think that Rose and Teddy Lloyd will soon be lovers." Sandy realized that Miss Brodie meant it. *She* 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. *She* had said that Teddy Lloyd wanted to give up teaching and was preparing an exhibition, and was encouraged in this course by art critics and discouraged by the thought of his large family. (129; my emphasis)

In this moment of revelation, it is revealed just how much Sandy has participated in Miss Brodie's process of transforming theory into future reality. It is Sandy who has fed Miss Brodie with the information that she wanted to hear, and her repetitive use of pronouns that refer to herself indicate that it was Sandy, rather than Miss Brodie, who acted as the primary agent in the narrativization of Rose and her imaginary love affair. However, this momentary self-revealing of Sandy's active collusion with Miss Brodie is soon occluded. As Miss Brodie continues to predict Rose's future, Sandy proceeds to label Miss Brodie as "Providence" and the "God of Calvin" who "sees the beginning and the end" (129). Sandy's own participation in Miss Brodie's prophecies is glossed over by the representation of Miss Brodie as an all-powerful "image" (129) of authority. In short, Sandy narrativizes Miss Brodie in the context of leader-follower logic and occludes her participation in Miss Brodie's narratives of the girls of her set. It is in this moment we may inscribe new motivations for Sandy; that she desires to erase her collusion

with authority and divest herself of the responsibility that comes with wielding power.

This re-inscription of Sandy's motivations reveals the complicated relationship between leader and follower in fascist communities. The relationship is mutually reinforcing; it is not simply a story of abusive authority, nor of a powerless follower forced to betrayal. It is the reciprocal dynamics in fascism that Spark aimed to expose by undermining the violence inherent in binary narrativization of the fascist follower.

VI. Conclusion

Spark reveals through *Prime* that a fascist follower's narrativization of the fascist leader in the context of a binary leader-follower ideology can be just as dangerous as the narratives that a fascist demagogue employs in order to unite a fascist community under the banner of a common destiny. It not only contains both the leader and follower into roles that ignore the reciprocal relationship of power within a fascist community, in which the follower projects himself onto the demagogue and invests the leader with authority, but also occludes the participation of the follower in creating narratives of destiny for the community individuals. By dismantling the leader-follower ideology that serves as the basis for Sandy's narrativization of Miss Brodie and the narrator's collusion in imbedding this "maxim" into the work, Spark aims to expose the complicated dynamics of the power relationship between the authoritarian leader and follower.

It is important to note that the reader is easily led to participate in the narrator's collusion of Sandy precisely because it is so difficult to "know" just when Spark is being ironic in her treatment of the narrator. The narrator undoubtedly displays marks of omniscience within the work, making it deceptively easy to equate the narrator with authorial authority. This is the trap that Spark has set for the reader, a trap designed, once the reader has successfully managed to avoid falling into it, to indicate just how easy it is to fall into and participate in a binary ideology that absolves the "victim" follower and justifies his/her actions as ethically correct. It is this sort of

reading that saves Miss Brodie from functioning merely as an object or emblem of authority in *Prime*, and perhaps provide the fledgling means as to “put a stop to Miss Brodie” (134) in the portraits of the Brodie girls.

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ABSTRACT

Sandy's Narrativization of Miss Brodie
and the Narrator's Collusion:
The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie as
an Anti-Fascist Text

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This paper attempts to read Muriel Spark's *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie* as an anti-fascist narrative that reveals the consequences of abusing authority while at the same time exposing the desires and participation of the fascist follower. Spark maintains an ironic distance between herself and the novel's narrative voice; the highly problematic morality of the narrator betrays his/her collusion with Sandy Stranger's objectification of Jean Brodie as an emblem of fascist authority. Reading the narrator's narrative techniques to aid and abet Sandy's gaze as authorial irony exposes fascist strategies of representation and narrative that the fascist follower deploys in order to secure the position of the powerless victim and thus occlude his own active participation within the fascist community.

Key Words *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie*, Muriel Spark, fascism, fascist representation, irony, authorial irony, narrator, narrative technique