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The Familiar Attractions of Fascism in Muriel Spark's *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie*

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"The Familiar Attractions of Fascism in Muriel Spark's The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie*" presents Spark's most famous novel as a provocative critical representation of fascism, comparing her analysis with those of Gilles Deleuze, Theodor Adorno, Virginia Woolf, and others. Spark highlights fascism's modes of consensus-building rather than its more readily visible authoritarian qualities and in doing so, usefully shifts our attention from the regimes' culpable deception of the masses to the fascist subject's motivations for shielding him or herself from the recognition of fascist violence. In particular, it inquires into how and why followers invested fascism with a rebellious capacity to break up a sedimented status quo, especially how some female subjects attributed to it a capacity for radical departures from patriarchal conceptions of womanhood.*

Keywords: fascism / authoritarianism / Muriel Spark / Jean Brodie / Deleuze

In Muriel Spark's 1962 novel, *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie*, the title character, a charismatic individualist and unabashedly romantic educator, forms and guides a clique of six students in a Scottish girls' school in the turbulent 1930s. The central narrative develops the skeptical perception of Sandy Stranger who as a member of the "Brodie set" resents increasingly the teacher's monomaniacal control. Sandy eventually discloses Miss Brodie's proselytization for Mussolini's and Franco's regimes to the conservative headmistress Miss Mackay who promptly fires the teacher armed with Sandy's revelation. Miss Brodie dies shortly after the war, never having recovered from her loss of position nor discovered which of her students had "betrayed" her.

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Martin McQuillan aptly describes *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie* as "Spark's novel of Fascism and fascisms" (4). Critics have commented extensively on the novel's political critique by exploring Miss Brodie's capacity for domination in terms of her abuse of professional authority and her assumption of quasi-religious leadership.[1] Nevertheless, perhaps because her attraction to fascism appears to be motivated by extra-political reasons and especially because she does not perceive the violence behind its idealist rhetoric and aesthetic appeal, they have tended to read her capitulation as an unwitting mistake. David Lodge, for example, writes that her "sympathy for the Fascist movements of the thirties is not a reasoned political attitude, but an extension of her egotism and romantic sensibility . . ." (247). Isobel Murray and Bob Tait argue that "Miss Brodie may be a born Fascist, as Sandy claims, but she is an instinctive and a relatively uncomprehending one" (110). Unable to see through Mussolini's pretenses of "dedication and discipline, efficiency, elimination of unemployment, and his charisma," Miss Brodie "remains blissfully unaware of the bullying tactics he and his henchmen ruthlessly employed" (108–09). Ann Ashworth agrees, writing that "Miss Brodie is culpably naïve in admiring Mussolini, but she is unaware of the persecutions, the enormity of the treatment of the Jews, and the price of what she supposes to be a Utopia that will end unemployment" (42). The contradictory "but" in these assessments cordons off "naïve" adherents as a special category of fascists, and indicates the novel's elliptical representation of interwar politics. As Murray and Tait observe, Spark hinders our impulse to scapegoat those who like Miss Brodie had thought highly of fascist regimes since we perceive fascism "with benefit of hindsight," and "a great many better informed people than Jean Brodie shared her admiration at the time" (108–09).

The purpose of this essay is to push these observations of the novel's ambiguity toward a stronger conception of Spark's political critique. The uneasy hesitation we experience to dismiss the character in a sweeping gesture suggests that in focusing on the "fascination" of fascism, Spark rejects a juridical analysis that would ignore fascism's attractiveness to potential constituents within liberal democracies, as well as its troubling persistence in the postwar period. Yet the novel does not as a result of featuring such a magnetic character posit the impossibility of judgment. After all, the novel suggests that although she probably would not have planned the concentration camps herself, Miss Brodie did not consider them a particularly serious moral failure, surmising after the war that "Hitler was rather naughty" (*Prime* 131). Her gross misapprehension of the Nazi war machine as a transgression of manners emphasizes fascism's reliance on diffuse structural conditions of possibility, including familiar gender and education norms in liberal democracies. For these reasons, I illuminate the poststructuralist elements in Spark's analysis of fascism that, like the theoretical work of Deleuze and Guattari, emphasize its exploitation of familiar

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dynamics of power established by bourgeois hegemony. In addition, I juxtapose Miss Brodie's equivocal approach to feminism with that of official British fascism in order to convey the subtle political complexity of the novel. Both of these focuses demonstrate the novel's strategies against the fascism embedded in liberal democratic contexts.

I. MISS BRODIE'S LINES OF FLIGHT

The Marcia Blaine School is distant from what we customarily identify as an official fascist nexus. It is not a college in the midst of a fascist nation, nor even a military prep school, but a private middle school for girls in Edinburgh. That the setting is a community composed primarily of women and girls within a liberal democracy, however, is an important facet of Spark's critique. Women who participated in fascist politics seem to epitomize the figure of the "innocent fascist," for they least of all are assumed to have perceived its real consequences. As Maria-Antonietta Macciocchi has claimed, however, this exoneration is "another way of sending women into a vacuum, or, on the contrary, of creating a theology of women (which in any case runs into the same historical void)" (67). By creating the fascist character as a woman and aesthete, Spark pushes us beyond this impasse. Patricia Duncker observes that *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie* is concerned with how modern women and girls operate in "mechanisms of power and rebellion inside closed systems . . . of surveillance and control" (70). Indeed, Spark conspicuously explores the world of "underlings"—women, students—and the complex undercurrents of desire and power that nourish their dedication to those in the position of "leaders" despite the ever-diminishing rewards of doing so.

Miss Brodie's overt control is most visible in her predictions concerning the girls' futures. As players in the teacher's vision and vice versa, the students' lives are dictated for them. As a storyteller, Miss Brodie recklessly orchestrates the girls' beginnings and endings, employing a prophetic lens that obfuscates events and qualities that do not conform to it. At times, their qualities even undergo considerable transformation in order to conform to these prophecies. For instance, she insists that Rose's "sex-instinct" will determine her future: "When you are seventeen or eighteen . . . you will come to the moment of your great fulfillment." When she first announces this prophecy, however, Rose Stanley is only eleven, preoccupied with "trains, cranes, motor cars, Meccanos and other boys' affairs," and is "an energetic climber of walls and trees" (27)—hardly qualities one associates with sex sirens. Eventually, however, Rose does win "a reputation for sex," channeling her tomboy interests into the ability to converse with boys about topics that interest them. She fits herself to Miss Brodie's narrative as if these interests "had been a conscious preparation" (27).

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The teacher's influence leads to the death of another student who'd been desperate to become a member of the Brodie set. The delinquent Joyce Emily who had already been expelled from five different schools before arriving at Marcia Blaine had once wanted to "wear a white blouse and black skirt and march with a gun" as an anti-Franco volunteer (126). She eventually dies when the train she is taking to Spain to fight inexplicably for Franco's side is bombed. Miss Brodie recalls to Sandy years later that "sometimes I regretted urging young Joyce Emily to go to Spain to fight for Franco. . . . I made her see sense. However, she didn't have the chance to fight at all, poor girl" (133). To accommodate her belief that she is at the center of their lives, Miss Brodie even narrates those events entirely beyond her control. She harbors a sadistic notion that Mary Macgregor's death by fire at twenty-two may have been "a judgment on poor Mary for betraying me . . ." (136).

Miss Brodie's narratives drastically alter traits that preceded her influence and at times work directly against the students' own interests. She does not distinguish between her own external pressure and her prophecy to perceive that she is a formidable determining force in their identity-formations. Cheyette locates Spark's ethical concern with a fascist appropriation of omniscient narrative: "In thinking of a life story as part of a predetermined design, other possible futures are of necessity excluded and diminished" (80). Lodge also perceives here an objection to "authorial omniscience" as a potential "denial of human autonomy, of human freedom" (237). These critical evaluations emphasize Miss Brodie's culpability in abusing her authoritative position vis-à-vis the girls and highlight her will to control. The novel, however, problematizes Sandy's similar critical gesture since in doing so, she exempts herself from responsibility for the formation of the Brodie set.

In contrast, Spark highlights fascism's modes of consensus-building rather than its more readily visible authoritarian qualities. This critical perspective is discomforting since it requires the reader's departure from the moralistic critique of fascism (eventually embodied by Sandy), not to mention a momentary eradication of critical distance from the fascist subject. In doing so, however, the novel usefully shifts our attention from the regimes' culpable deception of the masses to the fascist subject's motivations for shielding him or herself from the recognition of fascist violence. In particular, it inquires into how and why followers invested fascism with a rebellious capacity to break up a sedimented status quo, especially how some female subjects attributed to it a capacity for radical departures from patriarchal conceptions of womanhood.

The girls of the Brodie set are caught in the boundaries between radicalism and conformity, two prevalent attributes of adolescent group formation. Knowing that their lives are in a period of flux, Miss Brodie emphasizes their indeterminability and models a meaningful mode of rebellion against the social and sexual codes implied by "adult womanhood." In particular, she helps the

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girls to imagine alternatives to the adult female sexuality and labor that they associate with disastrous vulnerability and drudgery: "I wouldn't like to have sexual intercourse," Sandy remarks to her friend Jenny who agrees, "Neither would I. I'm going to marry a pure person" (19). To them, Miss Brodie in her prime represents the possibility of an unviolated state of womanhood. Speculating on how she would react to the nude statues in the city museum, Jenny says, "I don't think she would notice that it was naked. . . . she just wouldn't see its thingummyjig." Sandy summarizes the significance of this regal obliviousness and chastity: "I know. . . . Miss Brodie's above all that" (15). She appears to transcend the mundane bodily existence of their mothers. In turn, Miss Brodie expects more of her students in terms of labor than the domestic role that typically requires women's sexual availability. Believing that her girls are marked for heroic roles, she provides an alternative model of middle-class femininity that diverges from the prevalent route of marriage: "it was intolerable to Miss Brodie that any of her girls should grow up not largely dedicated to some vocation" (65). She insists, "You must all grow up to be dedicated women as I have dedicated myself to you" (66). Miss Brodie's influence also provides the girls a way to escape the systematic authority that is most palpable to them—the overwhelming conformity of the school itself, which is organized into "houses" meant to compete against one another. She notes courageously that "Phrases like 'the team spirit' are always employed to cut across individualism, love and personal loyalties . . ." (82–83).

In the first half of the novel, then, Miss Brodie constitutes for the girls the possibility of individualistic irreverence as well as a dramatic and theatrical center, and the girls in turn provide a medium for the teacher's rebellious aspirations. In her autobiography, Spark draws an enthusiastic and positive portrait of the "original" Miss Brodie, Christina Kay, who had taught Spark as a girl in Edinburgh.[2] Kay, a performative and "ideal dramatic instructor," relied heavily on her charisma in her classroom, which as Spark remembers, was "essentially theater" (*Curriculum Vitae* 57). It was Kay who had originally warned her class "not to be carried away by crowd emotions, not to be fools" (*Curriculum Vitae* 62). As many critics have pointed out, and as Sandy declares, elements of Miss Brodie's pedagogy were not without their "enlarging effects" (Spark, *Prime* 91). Lodge writes that "On the whole, Miss Brodie's teaching contrasts favourably with the dryasdust academic approach of the rest of the staff, and we feel a good deal of sympathy with her in her struggle with the jealously disapproving headmistress . . ." (245). In addition to instilling in her students the sense that their lives could be conducted differently from their parents, she adds to their knowledge of comparative religions (Spark, *Prime* 36), corrects their metaleptic analysis of the "Unemployed" as "Idle" (39), pushes them all to take the rigorous Classical curriculum over the more lackadaisical Modern one after they leave her classroom (64), and when they do enter that

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curriculum in the Senior School, they do remarkably well (with the exception of Mary Macgregor), tackling their work with the "capacity for enthusiasm that she herself had implanted" (88). Indeed, Miss Brodie is considered by students and teachers alike as the most "progressive" member of the faculty—an attribute that the other teachers find inappropriate and the students find exhilarating. Patrick Whiteley observes, "The girls seem more individually defined by virtue of Brodie's influence than they are likely to have been without it, and it is precisely this individualizing power that offers the Brodie set one of its most magnetic forces of attraction" (83). This tendency toward individualization seems to contradict her attraction to fascism, but only if we understand fascism to be an exceedingly conformist politics based on mass feeling or "crowd emotions." The novel, however, is concerned with those who saw in fascism opportunities to exercise iconoclastic forms of individualism.

Poststructuralist attention to "microfascisms" serves well to elucidate Spark's approach. Deleuze and Guattari's analysis of fascism in *A Thousand Plateaus* highlights the tendency of apparently centralized powers such as the totalitarian state to depend simultaneously on "a micrological fabric in which it exists only as diffuse, dispersed, geared down, miniaturized, perpetually displaced, acting by fine segmentation, working in detail and in the details of detail" (224). The school appears as one site that potentially proliferates microfascisms, where the development of authoritarianism depends paradoxically not on the exercise of repression alone, but also the production of distinctly individual self-policing identities: "What we have is no longer The Schoolmaster but the monitor, the best student, the class dunce, the janitor . . ." (224–25). Microfascisms also thrive on the modern desire to decode and flee, to sail "from the shores of security" (228) with the "movement of the arrow and the speed of an absolute" (229). In the context of pedagogy, they prey on our desire as students and teachers to deterritorialize the overcoded curriculum, to escape "the very fabric of social reality" (229).

Miss Brodie's privileging of art in her classroom comprises a radical departure from the school's authorized curriculum and methodology. Her unusual prioritization relieves the students from routine and results in their loyalty to her. It also appeases their desire for flight from the school administration's pragmatic and conservative groundwork. In particular, her class content emphasizes the cultivation of aesthetic taste over and above the hard sciences. She boldly proclaims, "Art and religion first; then philosophy; is greater than science. Art comes first, and then science. That is the order of the great subjects of life, that's their order of importance" (24–25). This pedagogical prioritization goes hand-in-hand with her politics. Near the beginning of the Brodie set's formation, Miss Brodie reveals to the students her direct opposition to the headmistress Miss Mackay's adherence to Stanley Baldwin's conservatism: "Miss Mackay . . . believes in the slogan 'Safety First.' But Safety does not come first.

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Goodness, Truth and Beauty come first" (7).[3] She judges her other colleagues on the science faculty as failures in their inability to understand a politics based on "vision": "They are all gross materialists, these women in the senior school, they all belong to the Fabian Society and are pacifists" (114). Whereas the science teachers tend toward materialist socialism, Miss Brodie's predilection for Mussolini's and Hitler's regimes is grounded by aesthetic criteria applied to her perception of urban space. Not only had "Mussolini . . . put an end to unemployment," but equally significant, under his rule, "there was no litter in the street" (31). Miss Brodie considers socialism and conservatism (associated in her mind pedagogically with science and math) as staid, earth-bound elements of the status quo, and fascism (associated in her mind pedagogically with literature and art) as a deterritorializing line of flight.

Deleuze and Guattari nevertheless call attention to the fascist tendency to bind such deterritorializing desires to reterritorializing forces. Micro-fascist desire eventually induces us to fix our places because despite the desire to flee, "we are always afraid of losing" (227). Ultimately, this tension is suspended and sustained as we "flee from flight, rigidify our segments, give ourselves over to binary logic; the harder they have been to us in one segment, the harder we will be on another; we reterritorialize on anything available" (227). In this way, fascist politics, born of political and economic insecurity, enables a mass-scale fetishization of "the great molar organization that sustains us, the arborescences we cling to, the binary machines that give us a well-defined status" (227). It induces lines of flight only to "enter a system that is no less concentricized, no less organized: the system of petty insecurities that leads everyone to their own black hole in which to turn dangerous, possessing a clarity on their situation, role, and mission even more disturbing than the certitudes of the first line" (228).

This combination of deterritorialization and reterritorialization is visible in the fascist mass aesthetic. Sandy's cogent observations of fascist images efface the radical veneer implied by the fascist self-description as "revolutionary." Mussolini's claims to transform Italy through revolt against rigid bourgeois stratification cannot be reconciled with his aesthetic production of obedient masses. In Sandy's view, Miss Brodie's photographs of the Italian fascists, which she shares with the class, convey an order that evinces reterritorializing forces: "They were dark as anything and all marching in the straightest of files, with their hands raised at the same angle, while Mussolini stood on a platform like a gym teacher or a Guides mistress and watched them" (31). Spark here calls attention to the fascist reproduction of both aesthetic and pedagogical desires, extending previous claims by Walter Benjamin in "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction" (1937) concerning fascism's "aestheticization of politics." The fascist mass aesthetic, as Sandy observes, forms "the straightest of files"—formations that attest not only to the masses' desire to regard themselves as works of art, but also as "good students."

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The Brodie set models this simultaneous deterritorialization and reterritorialization on the terrain of the school. As Sandy surmises, "the Brodie set was Miss Brodie's *fascisti*, not to the naked eye, marching along, but all knit together for her need and in another way, marching along" (31). Immediately after declaring her renegade slogan ("Goodness, Truth and Beauty come first"), Miss Brodie demands of her students, "Follow me" (7). In other words, it is not merely the departure from sedimentation that attracts the students to Miss Brodie, but also the promise of security that her mode of rebellion implies. The girls relish the combination of renegade non-conformity and familiarity, for Miss Brodie gives them the "exhilarating feeling of being in the faint smell of row, without being endangered by it" as they obediently follow the "dangerous Miss Brodie into the secure shade of the elm" (7). The price for their rebellion is their surrender of freedom to the set. As Miss Brodie declares, "you are mine . . . of my stamp and cut, and I am in my prime" (103).

In her discussion of the fascist subject's submission to authority, Hannah Arendt in *Eichmann in Jerusalem* (1963) discusses the "ruthless desire for conformity at any price," which is obscured by the Nazi "ideal of 'toughness'" (175). Spark suggests an inversion of Arendt's formulation in the case of the Brodie girls. Their desire to achieve autonomy is concealed by their conformity to the dictates and prophecies. Miss Brodie's demands and prophecies, after all, offer the girls thrilling visions of adulthood—running away, illicit sexual identities, earning money, and adventuring. Even as they become instruments of her narrative in the process, Miss Brodie's idiosyncratic and arbitrary predictions about the girls' futures create pictures of their own glamorously nonconforming adult lives and appeal to their fledgling individualism. The novel thereby addresses a blind spot in a liberal humanist analysis of fascism, which tends to ignore its appeal to nationalist women who identified with political leaders rather than craved subordination as followers. Although this humanist approach usefully draws attention to the ultimately patriarchal nature of fascist politics, it necessarily obscures its own reliance on a nationalist discourse that appeals to women's self-sacrifice as political subjects.

As the girls perceive increasingly Miss Brodie's constricting rather than enlarging effects, the motives for maintaining their loyalty become considerably strained. The narrator enables us to shift the view once more, this time from their own individual motives to the surrounding conditions that compel them to stay together as a set, i.e. the "normal" conditions that enable fascism to flourish. When their original reputation as renegades has become a recognizable institution within the Marcia Blaine school as a "system," the Brodie girls become an indispensable part of the organization overall. As the narrator notes, after the students' identities as a members of the set have been well-established, "It was impossible for them to escape from the Brodie set because they were the Brodie set in the eyes of the school" (118–19). Eventually, they

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cannot imagine an adequate line of flight without irrevocably damaging themselves: "in any case there was now very little they could say without implicating themselves. By the time their friendship with Miss Brodie was of seven years' standing, it had worked itself into their bones, so that they could not break away without, as it were, splitting their bones to do so" (123). Having chosen in the past their own places within the larger context of the school, they must continue to embrace their identity as a set: "they made the most of it, and saw that their position was really quite enviable" (119). Rather than its repression and anti-modernity, then, Spark emphasizes fascism's revolutionary appearance within a modern liberal democratic context to suggest that when we insist on its historical regression and seduction through nostalgia only, we inadvertently block a better consideration of its contexts.

Highlighting the Brodie set's reliance on these contexts, Nina Auerbach argues that its uniqueness as a female community is built on a myth of archetypal womanhood embodied by a leader who acts as a "lodestone of historical and spiritual power" (175). The group deterritorializes the idealistic patriarchal values of heroism and teamwork on which the school system is built, as well as its complement—the female world as a separate private haven (Auerbach 182).[4] In fact, the group's critical capacity lies in Miss Brodie's exposure of liberal humanist patriarchy's "thinness of humanitarianism and culture" (Auerbach 175). But if the Brodie set rejects the masculine humanism implied by the school's stress on "team spirit," it nonetheless reproduces its reliance on elitist scapegoating and exclusion, in part to satisfy an adolescent desire to belong. According to Auerbach, Miss Brodie's innovative vision of female community selectively appropriates patriarchal strategies of group formation and power. The set thrives "not because it withdrew from men and history, but because it assimilated them" (188). The Brodie girls' self-regard as an élite, or as Miss Brodie puts it repeatedly, "the crème de la crème," gives them secure identities and life narratives that accord with Miss Brodie's own unusual conceptions, a security that creates an ultimately dangerous and "fascinating satisfaction" (Deleuze and Guattari 225). In other words, the Brodie set deterritorializes older patriarchal conceptions of femininity in order to reterritorialize women's bodies with an even more pervasive network of power relations. The ways in which the set operates resonate with British fascist policy's patriarchal address of "modern women."

II. MISS BRODIE'S RETERRITORIALIZATIONS

The official fascist party in Britain, the British Union of Fascists (BUF) exploited a historical shift in the evaluation of women's domestic labor as the gender inequality inherent to the nineteenth-century ideology of separate spheres became increasingly visible as a contradiction in liberal democracies.

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This fissure was reduced within the parliamentary system, at least nominally, by laws that addressed women's status as (newly) enfranchised citizens; the Eligibility of Women Act (1918) legalized women's entry into parliament and the Sex Disqualification (Removal) Act (1919) opened the professions to women. British fascist theory also appealed to women's new relationship to the state as enfranchised or "nationalized" citizens, and thus called attention to their ability to articulate demands from the state as a political mass. The BUF, however, insisted on women's domestic labor as a national duty and *the* portal to state recognition as citizens. Like Miss Brodie, the BUF claimed to put into practice a new form of female agency, even as the form of labor they endorsed for women recalled a sedimented patriarchal tradition.

For example, their 1936 propaganda pamphlet *Fascism for the Million: The New Movement Simplified* suggested that under a fascist state, domestic women's special interests would be politically represented: "[W]omen not engaged in 'gainful' occupation, but who perform the important work of looking after the home and family, will elect their own representatives, nominated and chosen by themselves" (30). Another pamphlet, *Women Fight for Britain and Britain Alone* (1939), promised that "from the modern system, womanhood and the nation alike will benefit" (3). Both pieces suggested not only the fascist corporate state's benefits for women in the home, but also the reverse—unprecedented political activism for those who had been "falsely protected" from the state by the split between public and domestic spheres mandated by foundational theories of liberalism. The historian Julie Gottlieb observes that "[t]he very same skills and feminine discernment they applied to making a success of their housekeeping were seen as transferable to state level" (103).

The valorization of a gender division of labor that would have intensified women's self-sacrificial confinement to the home tempts us to compare British fascism with an older Victorian justification of women's political and economic disenfranchisement. The BUF, however, actually claimed to dismantle the "private" nature and goals of domestic desires and obliterate the domestic woman's apolitical stance and interior location. Instead, the corporate state would act as the new arbiter of women's social value in lieu of the private patriarchal family. From this point of view, the significance of women's physical and social reproduction of the family does not reside in the formation of civilized individuals and functional private patriarchal families, but rather in the unfolding of national "destiny." The rhetoric proposed the necessity of women's domestic labor for large-scale institutions such as the state, nation, and Empire.

Miss Brodie similarly deterritorializes Victorian middle-class womanhood by envisioning practices of femininity that diverge from a strictly private mode of existence. For example, she combines the rhetorical strategies of radicalism and nationalism when she informs her students that as modern women, they "are all heroines in the making. Britain must be a fit country for heroines to

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live in" (30). Even at her most radical in terms of her challenge to the ideology of marriage and class hierarchy, Miss Brodie invokes "destiny" and verges on a kind of fatalism that impinges on these flights. Accordingly, the historical and fictional models of women she repeatedly mentions are notable not for their autonomy but for their dramatic submission to a higher, seemingly pre-inscribed authority of fate. The Lady of Shalott, Florence Nightingale, Cleopatra, Helen of Troy, and the Queen of England all "sacrifice" themselves with an irreconcilably decisive fortitude. Even the Mona Lisa is imagined to be suffering, but heroically: "You girls . . . must learn to cultivate an expression of composure. It is one of the best assets of a woman, an expression of composure, come foul, come fair. Regard the Mona Lisa over yonder!" (21). In these examples, Miss Brodie implies her own self-sacrifice to the idea of her "destiny": "You girls are my vocation. If I were to receive a proposal of marriage tomorrow from the Lord Lyon King-of-Arms I would decline it. I am dedicated to you in my prime. Form a single file, now, please, and walk with your heads up, *up* like Sybil Thorndike, a woman of noble mien" (22). By citing herself as an example of self-sacrifice, Miss Brodie implies that she has earned the right to demand obedience from the girls in language that recalls Sandy's description of the *fascisti* ("a single file"). At the same time, she suggests the possibility that her self-sacrifice is actually a performance, both by hyperbolizing (she has given up not only marriage, but would forego marriage to the "Lord Lyon King-of-Arms") and by referring to Sybil Thorndike (the actress who inspired and played the role of Joan of Arc in George Bernard Shaw's *St. Joan*) as a model of demeanor. That the act of submitting to destiny may be performative suggests a paradox—supreme mastery of the will through self-effacement. The contradictions posed by the indeterminable nature of womanly self-sacrifice (is it "performative" or "actual"?) are revisited in the course of Miss Brodie's affair with Gordon Lowther, the music teacher.

Miss Brodie and Mr. Lowther conduct their love affair at Cramond, where the latter resides and the former develops an "obsession with Mr. Lowther's food." The girls, routinely invited to Cramond two at a time, explore the house while Miss Brodie is "curiously occupied in the kitchen with some enormous preparation for the next day's eating" (95). The free indirect narration enables us to observe the affair from the girls' point of view, as well as the incongruity of their perspective in relation to the situation at hand. For tea, Miss Brodie serves Mr. Lowther huge portions of food: "an admirable lobster salad, some sandwiches of liver paste, cake and tea, followed by a bowl of porridge and cream" (96). Whereas the teachers note the "manic" quality of Miss Brodie's new "project of fattening him up which was to grow to . . . huge proportions" (96), Sandy and Jenny, after noticing that Lowther's kitchen table piled up with food resembled "that of a holiday hotel," speculate in extravagant tones that Miss Brodie would "dress the great ham like the heroine she was" (100). Her

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elaborate cookery may appear as a regular act of self-sacrifice and a gendered enactment of a master/servant relationship, but the possibility of her servility to anyone is unthinkable to them. In its very excess, her domestic labor renders her heroic in their eyes so that it takes on the status of a conscious choice. Their perspective stresses the domestic laborer's exercise of free will rather than her subordination, in part by displacing Mr. Lowther from a position as the chief beneficiary of this labor. From the girls' perspective, her "service" paradoxically weakens him; he "never seemed quite at home in his home" and was "unable to see himself as master of the house" (96). Whereas Miss Brodie's embrace of domestic labor appears as a willful deterritorialization to the girls, the jarring dissonance between the act and their description ("dressing ham" and "heroine") suggests a severe resignation of the will. In sustaining the ambiguity of these domestic performances and invocations of "destiny," Spark's novel highlights the key contradiction in fascist rhetoric directed toward women.

Miss Brodie's rhetoric replicates that of the BUF by invoking the necessity of women's sacrifice to "higher ideals" rather than to the narrower reference of the husband/father or family. Both ostensibly encourage women's autonomy, detaching women from their traditional places in the family only to install a far more powerful and pervasive authority. The significance of Spark's critique lies in moving the focus of feminist critiques of fascism away from an implication of women's masochism toward the political and historical conditions that enabled this rhetoric to appear as revolutionary.

To many cultural critics who have considered the significance of domestic ideology to fascism, such enthusiastic embraces of self-sacrifice and the subordinate role historically ascribed to the domestic laborer epitomize its reliance on and exacerbation of female masochism.[5] Maria-Antonietta Macciocchi, for instance, extends lines of thinking in Wilhelm Reich's *The Mass Psychology of Fascism* (1933) to argue that fascism intensifies the female masochism originally cultivated by the patriarchal authoritarian family and institutionalized Christianity, explaining that fascism's repression and redirection of libidinal energy works in tandem with the masochistic boundaries and incitements already established by mystical Roman Catholic ideals of womanhood (74). She argues that in effect, it gives women more of the same "necrophiliac femininity" in exchange for security: "The body of fascist discourse is rigorously chaste, pure, virginal. Its central aim is the death of sexuality. . . . It is in the violent crisis of 'nuns who believe they are the brides of Christ . . . who choose other sexual paths, such as masochistic martyrdom' that the two roots of mysticism and the fascist drive can be joined" (75). Theodor Adorno as well argues that fascism appeases a female masochistic desire to "surrender"; Hitler "was well aware of the libidinal source of mass formation through surrender when he attributed specifically female, passive features to the participants of his meetings" (122). These critics' frameworks emphasize fascist rhetoric's conservative

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logic of gender and domestic labor rather than its appeal to those women who, like Miss Brodie, considered themselves to be epitomes of the "modern." Spark instead disarticulates a postwar assumption that many middle-class women capitulated to fascism because of the mystique it lent to the female passivity required by Victorian patriarchy.

The 1930s, the decade in which most of the novel is set, radically reconceptualized middle-class womanhood in Britain. The narrator refers to Miss Brodie as one of "legions of women" in "war-bereaved spinsterhood," the "vigorous daughters of dead or enfeebled merchants, of ministers of religion, University professors, doctors, big warehouse owners of the past, or the owners of fisheries" who embarked on "voyages of discovery" (43–44). In *Three Guineas* (1938), a polemical essay against fascism, Virginia Woolf similarly discusses the "daughters of educated men" or middle-class British women as radicalizing political, economic, and social forces. She foregrounds their desire to revolt against Victorian patriarchal confinement as well as the circuitry of power that shuttles this desire toward the mass politics of war and Empire: "So profound was her unconscious loathing for the education of the private house . . . that she would undertake any task however menial, exercise any fascination however fatal that enabled her to escape. Thus consciously she desired 'our splendid Empire': unconsciously she desired our splendid war" (Woolf 39). In Woolf's analysis, middle-class women began to participate directly in Empire-building and patriarchal warfare as nurses and drivers during World War I as a means of vicarious revolt against the Victorian gender and sexual ideology that, although in decline by the 1930s, continued to act as a powerful residual pressure to compel their confinement to the domestic home. Woolf therefore pinpoints modern conditions in which the advancement of women into spaces formerly associated exclusively with men in the nineteenth century coincided with a radical expansion of state power in the twentieth century. As Woolf describes British middle-class women's vicarious revolts on the war fields of Europe and the colonial peripheries, she pointedly warns against the pervasive power of the nation-state to contain and absorb women's revolutionary energies. Although ultimately, their self-sacrifice transforms their bodies into the state's instruments, the impetus cannot be aligned with "masochism" in Woolf's framework, for it carries with it, however unconsciously, a revolutionary charge beneath the reactionary surface.

In contrast to these women, Miss Brodie appears rather anachronistic. In Mary Schneider's view, her "imagination is of a rather old-fashioned kind. She remains a late Victorian romantic, unlike the other Edinburgh spinsters who . . . are curious, argumentative, above all, open to new ideas" (420). Indeed, Miss Brodie's "revolts" appear to be more thoroughly contained. Classroom settings of course have long been considered, as Duncker notes, "fields of conflict and battle which turn women into heroes" (70). Although her political

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attraction to fascism better seems to recall Macciocchi's description of "masochistic martyrdom" and Adorno's description of female "surrender," it is clear that she identifies with Hitler and Mussolini rather than nurturing a libidinal fascination for them. Lodge observes of Miss Brodie's connection to fascist dictators: "Aspiring to be a charismatic leader herself, she naturally admires the successful dictators, Hitler, Mussolini and Franco. The combination of dedication, elitism, bravura style and heady rhetoric characteristic of fascist movements appeals to her" (247). Early in the novel, she imagines herself as a tragic figure prone to betrayal, telling the girls that like Julius Caesar, she is the constant object of conspiracy: "If the authorities wanted to get rid of her she would have to be assassinated" (6). In her case, the phenomenon of what Adorno describes as a masculine psychological relationship to fascism is much more relevant. He writes that fascism gratifies the male subject's desire to project a superior vision of himself so that "by making the leader his ideal he loves himself . . . but gets rid of the stains of frustration and discontent which mar his picture of his own empirical self" (122). Although Miss Brodie's revolts are limited to re-imagining and transforming those spaces and roles already associated with women in the nineteenth century, Spark in line with Woolf suggests instead that women's motivation for participating in patriarchal forms of mass politics often diverges from masochistic desire—that middle-class women imagined it as a line of flight out of the home, even though that route into the political arena, as in the case of fascism, made suspect or even liquidated women's political agency. Faith Pullin asserts that one condition of Miss Brodie's perverse politics was that "her sphere of operations is too small" (85). In this vein, Spark emphasizes fascism's equivocal claims of creating new modes of autonomy for women rather than its appeals to female masochism. In depicting the relations of power between Miss Brodie and her students, Spark further implicates vicarious forms of "feminism" that resonate with British fascism's syncretic approach to women's roles.

III. ANTI-FASCIST NARRATIVE STRATEGIES

Spark's critical approach emphasizes fascism's misleading deterritorializations and the familiar conditions that enable it. Likewise, in narrative practice, she suggests anti-fascist strategies that address its collusion with fantasy rather than its repressive elements. Several different modes of narration counter Miss Brodie's prophetic narrative tendencies. First, empiricism, which otherwise might be associated with instrumental rigidity, here acts as potential opposition. When the students begin to take chemistry in the Senior School, they discover that far from the imaginative poverty that has been ascribed to it by Miss Brodie, the chemistry lab acts as a stimulating and unpredictable site of intellectual discovery. As Whiteley observes, "The science room introduces

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Sandy to just the sort of thinking which is least amenable to Brodie's control" since "empirical inquiry pulls epistemological authority away from the center" (93). In the context of Miss Brodie's control over the girls through aesthetic means, empirical science acts as a way "out," an unpredictable mode of rebellion that does not require an authoritarian leader: "Here in the science room . . . lessons were called experiments, which gave everyone the feeling that not even Miss Lockhart knew what the result might be, and anything might occur between their going in and coming out and the school might blow up" (Spark, *Prime* 80).

The skeptical capacity of scientific education and empirical observation resonates in turn with the development of Sandy's revolt against Miss Brodie. As Sandy's attention begins to wander during a recitation of Miss Brodie's favorite poem, Tennyson's "The Lady of Shalott," she undercuts its romantic elements, imagining the following conversation with the Lady after she has written her name on the prow of her boat and lays dying: "By what means did your Ladyship write these words?" to which the Lady replies, "There was a pot of white paint and a brush which happened to be standing upon the grassy verge. . . . It was left there no doubt by some heedless member of the Unemployed" (20). As Murray and Tait argue, "Sandy was always more a realist than Miss Brodie, could always more clearly discriminate between fantasy and reality" (118). The narrator also often employs dry and spare descriptions that echo Sandy's developing satirical irony regarding Miss Brodie.

Nevertheless, while empirical description and satirical irony ably police Miss Brodie's transgressions, neither can compete with her imaginative modes of persuasion. They tend rather to place the entire pursuit of aesthetics under question as a divergence from (scientific or political) truth. Moreover, without the ability to compete with any of Miss Brodie's attractive romantic characteristics, Sandy's satirical rejection inadvertently replicates Miss Brodie's own scapegoating gestures. Even as Sandy embodies a critical perception missing in the other characters, she repeatedly implicates herself in the creation and maintenance of Miss Brodie's leadership.

The narrator offers a different strategy of anti-fascist critique in the novel's "flash-forwards," and a challenge to Miss Brodie that is both less direct and more effective than Sandy's empirical approach. The flash-forwards are affiliated with Miss Brodie's prophetic determinism insofar as they too look into the girls' futures and appease the readers' desire for narrative unfolding. Whiteley notes that the flash-forwards compete with and "to some degree validat[e] Brodie's power to see the beginning and the end" (89). Importantly, however, the narrator in these sequences demonstrates the capacity of the human to begin anew and creates a readerly desire for unpredictability.[6] Arendt, in *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (1951), argues that one of fascism's violations was its attempt to usurp human unpredictability in the quest to narrate beginnings

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and ends. The narrative task for an anti-fascist novel, in this respect, would be to nurture the desire to begin again, for "Beginning, before it becomes a historical event, is the supreme capacity of man; politically, it is identical with man's freedom. . . . This beginning is guaranteed by each new birth; it is indeed every man" (479). The significance of the flash-forward for the novel's critique of fascism lies not only in revealing fascism's narrative futility, but also its arousal of a readerly desire for beginnings. As Lodge notes, the flash-forward that tracks Jenny's future as an adult in particular reminds the reader of "the 'hidden possibilities in all things', of the ultimate inscrutability and unpredictability of the shapes human lives assume" (239). In demanding our attention to the subtle but key differences that constitute acts of narrative control, the narrator obliterates the reader's will to be led. In these ways, the novel creates a complex critique of fascist desires that subtend some of the twentieth century's most familiar environments.

Notes

1. David Lodge argues that the novel posits fascism as an illegitimate group formation that as a "travesty of the Christian Church" competes heretically with Catholicism (250). Bryan Cheyette also argues that the Brodie set is a form of "specious messianism" (56). Others have connected Miss Brodie's pedagogy to Hitler's and Mussolini's theatrical political styles, elaborating especially on her imitation of their egotistical and ultimately tyrannical solipsism. See Anne Bower's "Tyranny, Telling, and Learning: Teaching the Female Student" *Philological Papers* 1990 (36): 38–45.

2. In addition, Spark speculates that the name "Brodie" may have derived from her unconscious amalgamation of Christina Kay with Charlotte Rule (née Brodie), a generous and an inspiring friend of the Spark family who taught her to read (*Curriculum Vitae* 56).

3. "Safety First" was Stanley Baldwin's campaign slogan in the 1929 General Election.

4. Ashworth disagrees with Auerbach's definition of the "team's" significance, arguing that Miss Mackay's valorization of teams is a form of "coerced cooperation" that is "more totalitarian by far than Miss Brodie" (40).

5. See Laura Frost's *Sex Drives: Fantasies of Fascism in Literary Modernism* (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 2002) for a critique of the historical and cultural genesis of representations of fascism "as a gendered sadomasochistic encounter between a male leader and the collectively feminized 'masses'" (38).

6. Whiteley continues, "The omniscient narrator, however, like Sandy herself, does poke beyond Brodie's boundaries, sometimes showing how the girls have shaken off her influence and revealing matters beyond the scope of Brodie's awareness" (89).

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