Because I Am In My Prime

"A Psychoanalytical Reading of Muriel Spark's

The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie"

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2013

C-Essay, 15p

English, Literature

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Introduction

At the surface Muriel Spark’s novel *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie* depicts a teacher who devotes herself so much to her vocation, that she readily devotes her prime to her calling. As the title indicates, the main character in the novel is accordingly Miss Jean Brodie, and she works at a girls’ school in Edinburgh. The setting is reflecting the city in the 1930s, even if the novel was written in 1960. Moreover, only recently, in October 2012, the novel was presented in *BBC Scotland’s series Landmark* by Philip Dodd, where he told that the story is loosely based on Spark’s own schooldays at The James Gillespie Academy, and the protagonist, Miss Brodie, ”is inspired by one of Spark’s own teachers at this school, Christina Kay” (Dodd).

The main character is portrayed both as charismatic and glamorous, with modern and refreshing ideas on education. In addition to that, she makes her classes fun, fascinating and full of adventure. She is also popular among her pupils, and they are closely connected to their teacher, who generously shares her passion for culture with them. Accordingly, central to the plot of this novel is Miss Brodie’s relation with her specific set, which consists of six girls.

However, very soon as the story advances, the reader notices how Miss Brodie seems to put much effort into finding excuses, as well as in repeating empty phrases; ”If only you small girls would listen to me, I would make you the crème de la crème.” This phrase, beside ”because I am in my prime” will be reiterated by the main character numerous times across the novel.

Accordingly, very soon in the novel the reader understands that there is something peculiar about Miss Brodie, since it seems that her teaching is merely an empty facade, and this becomes even more obvious, since she seems to be constantly on
her guard against visits from the school’s headmistress to the classroom. On top of that, Miss Brodie does not prefer to socialize with the grownup staff at the school, but gathers her pupils tightly around her, by inviting them for suppers and teas, and she also confides her private problems to them. However, Miss Brodie repeatedly bullies one of the girls, by pointing her out as a scapegoat, seemingly whenever a chance is offered, but otherwise she is controlled and composed in her acting. Finally, the most striking episodes in the novel are when Miss Brodie tries to embroil one of her pupils in an affair with the man she herself is in love with, and when she inspires one of her students to go and join the Spanish Civil War, where the girl eventually dies.

Moreover, side by side with reproductions of famous works of art, for example like the Mona Lisa, Miss Brodie also has an image of Mussolini pinned to the classroom wall. Furthermore, it gradually becomes obvious that neither Miss Brodie’s vocation nor her promises to her pupils may in the first place include supporting their academic achievements. For the reader it seems quite obvious that the author has depicted a confused and neurotic character, and this is part of the novel’s charm, but what is confusing with the protagonist is the lack of logic behind some of her actions.

In order to understand what takes place in the mind of this fascinating character I will in this essay use psychoanalytic methods for the analysis. Accordingly, Peter Barry explains in his book *Beginning Theory* what kind of literary problems psychoanalytic literary criticism could solve, and ”uncovering the unconscious motives of characters” is one of its aims (101). Thus the motive of using the method in question is to learn more about the main character’s unconscious motives and the psychological mechanisms behind them.

Accordingly, the aim of this essay is to find psychological explanations behind Miss Brodie’s manipulation of her pupils, but also to examine the meaning behind her claim, that she devotes her prime to them.

**Psychoanalytic approach**

This essay will argue that the reason for Miss Brodie’s manipulative behavior towards her pupils, and the claim that she devotes her prime to them, is due to anxiety, where repressive defense mechanisms in the unconscious of the protagonist remove the reality for her. This claim takes support from Freudian theories, based on the discoveries made originally by the Austrian psychoanalyst Sigmund Freud, but also on those made
by his daughter, Anna Freud. Moreover, Peter Barry states that; "all of Freud’s work depends upon the notion of the unconscious, which is the part of the mind beyond consciousness which nevertheless has a strong influence upon our actions" (92). However, it should be noted that even if Freud’s work has been widely questioned, it could be said that his ideas and discoveries about the structure of the human mind were almost epoch-making, since they changed the perception of the human psychology. Accordingly, the American psychologist Barbara Engler explains in her book *Personality Theories* that Freud’s conclusion that the main energy source in the human personality is based on sexual impulses, changed the traditional Western thought on this issue; "In Freud’s theory, human life is subsumed under a sexual model. The way in which people invest their libido determines their future” (46). This mode of thought seems to mean that a person’s sexual preference is the whole base of their personality.

Moreover, since the claim in this essay is that the protagonist suffers from anxiety, it is motivated to explain what this means. The American psychologists Jess and Gregory Feist state in their book *Theories of Personality*, "in defining anxiety, Freud (1933/1964) emphasized that it is a felt, affective and unpleasant state accompanied of a physical sensation that warns a person against impeding danger.” (33). Most of us could also identify with this kind of reaction, and an example of a physical reaction could be a pain in the stomach or a pressure on the chest for no apparent reason.

Moreover, according to Feist et al, another commonly known Freudian concept that goes hand in hand with the former is castration anxiety, a state which according to Freud both boys and girls experience during their childhood, however in slightly different shapes. For females the equivalent seems to be the concept of penis-envy, which appears to indicate how girls detect how boys possess something that they don’t have, and thus become jealous, not only of the genitals, but of the fact that boys seem to have “something extra”. Feist et al state that “This experience of penis envy is a powerful force in the formation of girls’ personality. Unlike castration anxiety in boys, which is quickly repressed, penis envy may last for years in one form or another” (43). However, it seems that the practical understanding of this concept could be that castration anxiety means the fear of lack or loss in a more general sense, but that this fear would thus be a dominating force in the individual. In the following quote Anna Freud gives an example of this in her book *The Ego and the Mechanisms of Defence,*
where she describes a little girl who has an obsessive need to have something to display, since she compares herself with her brothers; ”at the same time exhibitionism played a considerable part in the development of her instinctual life, and so her envy and her wish for a penis took the form of a desire to have, like her brothers, something to display” (A.Freud 92). Moreover, Anna Freud also refers to another of her patients, a boy; ”who, when I knew him, would fall into a state of extreme ill-humour whenever he saw an unusually tall or powerful man” (94). Thus it seems that the practical understanding of the anxiety caused by either castration anxiety or penis envy could also be understood as feelings of inferiority. Accordingly, Feist et al also present one of Freud’s examples of how this could manifest itself in dreams; ”castration anxiety can be expressed in dreams of growing bald, loosing teeth, or any act of cutting” (50). It should be noted that this concept is controversial, especially in its view on girls’ development. According to Peter Barry ”distrust of Freud has been growing in recent years, partly as a result of his mainly negative views on women, as seen in the notion that women’s sexuality is based upon feelings of narcissism, masochism, and passivity, and the idea that they suffer from an innate form of inferiority complex known as penis envy” (98). Moreover, according to Feist et al, it seems that Freud suggested this view cautiously from the beginning, but as time passed, he started to insist on it (59).

Feist et al state that ”Freud’s greatest contribution to personality theory is his exploration of the unconscious and his insistence that people are motivated primarily by drives of which they have little or no awareness” (Feist 23). However, in order to identify these conditions, we must first understand how Freud thought that these forces work in the unconscious. According to Feist et al ”Freud used the German word Trieb to refer to a drive or a stimulus within the person”, and the translation means drive or impulse. Moreover, Feist et al state that ”Freud used the word libido for the sex drive” (31). Furthermore, Barbara Engler explains Freud’s ideas of the structure of the human personality, where he had a theory about a division into three instances, which in English are called the id, the ego and the super-ego. Each of these institutions represent different aspects in the human mind (47). Engler also points out that regarding this division we should remember that there are no sharp boundaries between their functions; ”in discussing the id, the ego and the super-ego, we must keep in mind that these are not separate entities with sharply defined boundaries, but rather they represent a variety of different processes, functions, and dynamics within the person” (46).
However, according to Freudian theory, the basic drive that ignites our motivation is a concept known as the "pleasure principle". Accordingly, Anna Freud explains that "the sovereign principle which governs the psychic processes is that of obtaining pleasure" (7). This principle could be explained thus; that our psychic instances seek solutions which offer a minimum of tension, in the form of pain and psychic pressure. Moreover, Barbara Engler explains the function of this operation thus; "that the id seeks to discharge the tension and return to a more comfortable level of energy. In seeking to avoid painful tension and obtain pleasure, the id takes no precautions but acts immediately in an impulsive and nonrational way". Since this instance works by impulse and not by our conscious intention, the results of its actions could be irrational and sometimes even harmful (47).

However, according to Engler, of these three structures in the personality,"the id" is described as "the core of our being" and it is regarded to obey the "pleasure principle". Thus this psychic institution is understood as the base for our motivation and our wishes, and Engler means that "it is the reservoir of psychic energy that provides the power for all psychological functioning. Accordingly, in seeking to avoid painful tension and to obtain pleasure, the id takes no precautions but acts immediately in an impulsive, nonrational way". Moreover, the id itself seems to be a mere mechanism, which by itself does not take into consideration the consequences of its actions, and thus it may often act in ways that cause damage both to the self but also to others; "It pays no heed for the consequences of its actions and therefore frequently behaves in a manner that may be harmful to the self or others". Barbara Engler explains how the demands of the id are mere impulses, and she means that the original words for its needs in the German language better expresses the function of the instance; "for example, the German idiom for "I am hungry...translates literally as "It hungers me," implying that I am a recipient of actions initiated in me, not by me" (46). This seems to explain how this instance is operated primarily by the instinct and not by the conscious mind.

Furthermore, the second instance which balances the demands of the id is "the ego". It seems that the ego draws on the id’s energy, as well as it acquires its structures and functions from the id, but it also seems to serve the id by meeting its demands in contact with reality; "thus the ego is the executor of the personality, curbing the id and maintaining transactions with the external world in the interest of the fuller personality" (Engler 47).
However, whereas the id obeys this "pleasure principle", the ego follows the "reality principle", meaning that the ego is attempting to satisfy the id’s impulses in a manner that is adjusted to reality and the outside world. This process seems to work in a way where the ego postpones the discharge of tension until the appropriate object that will satisfy the need in question has been found. Moreover, the id feeds the fantasies and wishes of so called "primary processes", which are the cognitive and perceptual skills that help an individual distinguish reality from fantasy. Engler explains that "this process includes higher intellectual functions of problem solving, which let the ego establish suitable courses of action and test them for their effectiveness". Moreover, these two instances are interdependent and "the id is the faithful servant of the ego". It appears as if the id sends the signals and the ego executes these signals, however, adjusted to reality (47).

Finally, the third of these instances, "the superego", represents our internalized values and moral standards. According to Barbara Engler, this is the last of these institutions in the personality to mature and she states that it "may be seen as an outcome of the interactions with one’s parents during the long period of childhood dependency" (47). This seems to mean that our conscience and our moral standards could be the result of the teaching of our parents, and that they have developed into a perception of an idea of an ideal self-image. However, this means that this instance could be very powerful in its demands, something that might result in severe pressure and psychic anxiety, if the ego disobeys the guidance and the impulses of the super-ego; "the superego strives for perfection. It seeks moralistic rather than realistic solutions" (48). Engler accordingly states that "its moralistic demands may resemble those of the id in their intensity, blindness, and irrationality. In its uncompromising manner, the superego may inhibit the needs of the id, rather than permit their ultimate necessary and appropriate satisfaction" (48). Thus it seems that the impulses from these instances may result in a conflict of interest.

However, according to Engler, if the adult personality is well adjusted and balanced, "the ego is the primary executor", which means that in the ideal situation the other instances are subservient to the ego. Thus, under these conditions it controls both the id and superego, mediating between their demands and impulses, and in the optimal situation the ego is also balancing their impulses with reality. But development does not always proceed according to ideal circumstances. For example, it seems that the ego
often ends up attacked and pulled between these two forces, the id and the super-ego, where ”one demands instant satisfaction and release. The other places rigid prescriptions on that release” (48). Thus it seems a logical consequence, that intricate solutions take place in the human mind, some of which completely in the unconscious, in order to offer release from pressure to the ego.

Interestingly, Anna Freud seems to mean that especially demands from the super-ego causes pressure for the adult ego, since if the ego submits to the super-ego’s demands, it must both repress the impulses from the id, since the super-ego censors these impulses, but it must also adjust the demands of the latter to the real world; ”the motive which prompts the defense is not originally its own. The instinct is regarded as dangerous because the super-ego prohibits gratification and, if it achieves its aim, it will certainly stir up trouble between the ego and the super-ego” (58). Thus, as is already indicated, the ego ends up solving the demands of both these institutions, and this could result in conflict between both these instances, a condition which seems to be described as neurosis. Anna Freud accordingly states that ; ”hence the ego of the adult neurotic fears the instincts, because it fears the super-ego. Its defence is motivated by super-ego anxiety” (59). However, the intricate solutions that the human mind offer, are what Freud called defense mechanisms.

Accordingly, Feist et al state that ”another core component of Freud’s theory involved the defense mechanisms, especially repression. The unconscious actively (dynamically) keeps ideas, feelings, and unpleasant or threatening impulses out of consciousness”. In order to maintain the psychological balance, and release anxiety from the ego, the individual creates defense mechanisms (55).

Furthermore, Barbara Engler explains that ”defense mechanisms share two features; they occur on an unconscious level so that we are not aware of what we are doing, and they distort reality so as to make it less threatening” (50). Moreover, Feist et al state that ”although defense mechanisms are normal and universally used, when carried to an extreme they lead to compulsive, repetitive, and neurotic behaviour” (34). This is because much psychic energy is needed both to establish and to maintain defense mechanisms; the more defensive people are, the less psychic energy is left to satisfy the id's impulses. Accordingly, the purpose of these reactions is to protect the individual against anxiety. Feist et al state that ”this of course, is the ego’s purpose in establishing defense mechanisms--to avoid dealing directly with sexual and aggressive
implosives and to defend itself against the anxiety that accompanies them (Freud, 1926/1959a: Feist et al 35). However, according to Engler, it appears that these mechanisms are crucial for survival, and all people have them, but if our self-image collides too much with reality, the defense mechanisms may distort our perception of reality. Engler states that "defense mechanisms in and of themselves are not harmful. No one is free of defenses; we need them in order to survive. Although defenses can block personal and social growth if they become predominant, they do protect us from excessive anxiety and frequently present creative solutions to our problems” (52).

However, in the same way as the psychic instances dominates the personality, defense mechanisms could also result in numerous different outcomes and psychological conditions.

According to Feist et al, the main defense mechanisms that Freud discovered are repression, reaction formation, displacement, fixation, regression, projection, introjection and sublimation” (35). Moreover, in Engler’s overview denial is also added to the list (50). However, in order to facilitate the understanding of how the personality could be affected by these reactions, an explanation of how they operate in the unconscious will be presented. To begin with, according to Anna Freud, it seems that the reaction itself always follows the same pattern, however, it could be triggered by various stimuli. Anna Freud accordingly states that "the instinctual dangers against which the ego defends itself are always the same, but its reasons for feeling a particular irruption of instinct to be dangerous may vary” (58). This seems to mean that the human mind could identify many different sources for its anxiety, but the way it deals with these sources is always the same. According to Anna Freud, the defensive process follows these turns; "the position here is that some instinctual wish seeks to enter consciousness and with the help of the ego to attain gratification. The latter would not be averse to admitting it but the super-ego protests” (58). Thus it seems that the ego is submissive to the super-ego in the way that it obeys its demands, and reacts only to please the other instance, with no connection to reality, since its only motive is to fulfill the super-ego’s wishes; "the ego submits to the higher institution and obediently enters into a struggle against the instinctual impulse, with all the consequences which such a struggle entails” (58). It seems that since the priority for the ego is the wish fulfillment of the super-ego, it cannot take possible clashes with the real world into consideration, and since this process is a mere reaction, it takes place in a way that the individual does
not detect it and could accordingly not regard it as harmful; “the characteristic point about this process is that the ego itself does not regard the impulse which it is fighting as in the least dangerous” (58). Accordingly, if the ego does not detect the danger of obeying the super-ego’s demands, this apparently could result in more or less irrational solutions.

Feist et al explain that the primary and most basic defense mechanism, which is also included in all the other defense mechanisms, is repression; “whenever the ego is threatened by undesirable id impulses, it protects itself by repressing those impulses; that is, it forces threatening feelings into the unconscious” (Freud, 1926/1959a). This indicates that the basic function of all defensive reactions is to more or less sweep away these unwanted impulses into the unconscious (Feist 35). But what happens with the impulses after they have become unconscious? It seems that several scenarios are possible; the impulses may stay completely unchanged, but they might also force their way up into consciousness in an unchanged form, in which case they could create more anxiety than a person could handle, with the result that the psyche could be overwhelmed with anxiety. Anna Freud states that “we do not know precisely what takes place in the adult ego when it chooses delusional gratification and renounces the function of reality-testing. It severs itself from the outside world and entirely ceases to register external stimuli” (88). It seems that in this way the defensive reaction could distort the reality for the individual, since the primary aim in the unconscious is only to protect the ego from anxiety and pressure.

However, I will present a short overview of the defense mechanisms mentioned, since their functions seem to apply to the protagonist in Muriel Spark’s novel. One of these mechanisms is “reaction formation”, which, according to Feist et al, means that a repressed impulse may become conscious through adopting a mask that is more or less opposed to its original form. The behavior affected of this defense could be “identified by its exaggerated character and by its obsessive and compulsive form” (Freud 1926/1959a: Feist 35). Feist et al illustrate this with an example of “a young woman who deeply resents and hates her mother. Because she knows that society demands affection towards parents, such conscious hatred for her mother would produce too much anxiety”. Thus, in order to avoid anxiety, it seems that her reaction is to create a complete opposite scenario, where she instead decides to love the mother. However, this manifestation of love is neither genuine nor honest and becomes “showy, exaggerated,
and overdone” (35). Moreover, according to Feist et al, in a case like this, most people around would usually detect the false nature of such reactions, but the woman herself, would in this case, stick tightly to her reaction formation, since this version of reality would help her hide the anxiety (Feist 35). However, this reaction has similarities with Miss Brodie’s theatrical exclamations of how she reiterates to the girls how they are her vocation, and how she is devoting her prime to them.

Moreover, another defense reaction is displacement, which resembles the former, but with the difference that in displacement “people can redirect their unacceptable urges onto a variety of people or objects so that the original impulse is disguised or concealed” (Feist et al 36). This seems to indicate that if a person is angry at someone, he or she might displace this anger into various other targets, such as on an employee or a student. However, a difference between displacement, and the former, reaction formation, is that in displacement the friendly reaction towards the object that causes anxiety does not result in the same kind of exaggerated behaviour.

According to Feist et al, the psychological maturing itself is often combined with stress and anxiety. Hence the prospect of taking the next step of development could be very frightening, something that could cause that the ego attempts to remain at the present phase, which could be far more comfortable. This type of defense is called fixation; “technically, fixation is the permanent attachment of the libido onto an earlier, more primitive stage of development” (Freud 1917/1963: Feist 36). The remaining on a comfortable and familiar psychological stage could thus be an easy solution for the ego.

The defense mechanism of regression, is similar to fixation, since in this reaction the personality, when exposed to pressure, may revert to earlier and more secure phases of development. Thus this reaction may focus the energy towards familiar objects instead of new, threatening and unknown; ”Once the libido has passed a developmental stage, it may, during times of stress and anxiety, revert back to that earlier stage. Such a reversion is known as regression” (Freud 1917/1963). Feist et al explain that ”under extreme stress one adult may adopt the fetal position, another may return home to mother, and still another may react by remaining all day in bed, well covered from the cold and threatening world”. However, the regressive reaction differs from fixation, since it is described as temporary, whereas fixation is permanent (36).

Furthermore, another defense mechanism is projection. According to Barbara Engler, it works through referring to the attribution of a characteristic, or a behaviour
onto someone else. "An individual who unconsciously feels hostile toward someone may project the hostility onto the other person. Further, it permits us to defend ourselves aggressively against our opponent and thereby indirectly express our impulses” (50). In addition, this reaction reminds of Miss Brodie’s scapegoating of one of her pupils. Accordingly, Engler exemplifies projection as ”blaming another for your act or thinking that someone is out to get you”. However, this defensive reaction lets us act out our aggressive impulses onto a nonthreatening object, but by replacing the source of anxiety (51).

Anna Freud explains that in projection the defensive reactions could have both positive and negative outcomes, since when the reaction projects our aggressions into other people, which logically might be harmful for our relations; "The mechanism of projection disturbs our human relations when we project our own jealousy and attribute to other people our own aggressive acts”. However, as Anna Freud also points out, this reaction could take a completely different direction; ”but it may work in another way as well, enabling us to form valuable positive attachments and so to consolidate our relations with one another”. This positive form of projection is by Anna Freud called ”altruistic surrender”, and the term comes from the German expression Altruistische Abtretung, and was originally coined by the Viennese psychoanalyst Edward Bibring. The reaction in this form of defense works thus; ”This normal and less conspicuous form of projection might be described as ‘altruistic surrender’ of our own instinctual impulses in favour of other people” (A. Freud 133). Thus it seems that the outcome of this mechanism could allow a person to keep a mental balance and a seemingly positive self image, where the violation of the urges of the id and the super-ego otherwise could have resulted in anxiety.

It should also be noted, that for children, turning the world into its opposite seems regarded as completely natural, and they also seem to adjust the world according to their needs in their play. However, Anna Freud explains that ”the elements for the construction of a pleasurable world of phantasy lie ready to the child’s hand, but his task and his achievements are to recognize and assimilate the facts of reality” (90). This seems to mean that for children the transition between play and reality is quite natural. However, the opportunities of the world of children could attract an adult, due to the possibilities to denial of the real world. Accordingly, Anna Freud states that ”when grown-up people consent to enter into the fictions whereby children transform a painful
reality into its opposite, they invariably do so under certain strict conditions” (91). Accordingly, we have all been children and since we once had this opportunity at hand, it makes it familiar and secure for us. However, in a state of psychological stress, this kind of denial might be a convenient solution to an ego overwhelmed from pressure.

However, denial in itself is also a defense mechanism, and according to Barbara Engler it "entails refusing to acknowledge an unpleasant reality or fact of life". Engler exemplifies this with people’s tendency to deny that they could be affected of illnesses, or that an abuse of drugs or alcohol would not affect them (50).

Finally, we will take a look at the two developmental stages that Miss Brodie’s girls cross during the novel, since the understanding of them will clarify how defense mechanisms might operate in the mind of Miss Brodie.

The first of these stages is the latency period and the second is the genital stage. Barbara Engler explains that the latency period takes place somewhere between the age of seven and puberty; "during the latency period, psychic forces develop that inhibit the sexual drive and narrow its direction. Sexual impulses which are unacceptable in their direct expression, are channeled and elevated into more culturally accepted levels of activity, such as sports, intellectual interests and peer relations” (44). Moreover, it seems that this is due to parents’ and society’s suppression of sexual impulses in this stage of development. Moreover, another feature to be noted in this period, according to Feist et al, is that "during this time children form groups or cliques” (45).

Moreover, according to Feist et al, "the puberty signals the reawakening of the sexual aim and the beginning of the genital period”. The changes that the transition causes, probably mean a radical change from the earlier stage. Moreover, in the beginning of puberty, according to Barbara Engler; "the infantile sexual life is transformed into its adult form, and the sexual interest shifts to members of the opposite sex”. Engler explains that "according to Freud, the genital stage is the end point of a long journey, from autoerotic sexual activity to the cultural norm of heterosexual activity”. Moreover, attaining the genital stage from Freud’s point of view seems to mean that the individual adapts to accepted social norms and society’s demands regarding moral codes and an accepted life style. Barbara Engler states that; "Mature people satisfy their needs in socially approved ways. They accommodate themselves to, function within, and seek to uphold the laws and taboos, and standards of their culture. The mature person is able to love in a sexually approved way and also to work
productively in society” (44). This seems to mean that in order to have a contact with reality, the mere process of maturing or psychological development must be allowed to take its natural course, but since the process itself could be threatening, the ego might attempt to seek alleviation from the pressure that this causes.

**Discussion**

In order to give an understanding of the setting within which the protagonist is illustrated, those events that make Miss Brodie’s manipulation stand out will be pointed out.

As we already know, the main character shares her interest for culture, art and poetry with her pupils, by taking them to the theatre, to the ballet, and by sharing with them the world of art and painting. However, besides, in the world of art and culture, Miss Brodie also has a passion for Italy, and pinned to her class-room wall there is an image of the Mona-Lisa, but also one of Mussolini; “these girls were discovered to have read of the Buchmanites and Mussolini, the Italian Renaissance painters, the advantages to the skin of cleansing cream and witch-hazel over honest soap and water...as had the love lives of Charlotte Brontë and Miss Brodie herself” (Spark 5). Moreover, as we understand from the quote above, Miss Brodie’s teaching often consist of stories from her love life and topics that she seems to find more interesting than the ordinary curriculum.

As mentioned, Miss Brodie is constantly on her guard against visits from the headmistress, and therefore she has prepared the girls in advance by telling them what they should answer about the lesson’s content, if someone would come unannounced in for a visit; “If anyone comes along’ said Miss Brodie, ‘in the course of the following lesson, remember that it is the hour for English grammar” (Spark 12). Thus the girls help her to keep up a facade of ordinary classroom activities. As is mentioned in the introduction, Miss Brodie reiterates across the novel, how she is devoting herself to educating her group of girls, and she is constantly underlining how she is doing this in her prime: ”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” (Spark 23). However, since Miss Brodie is a teacher, and since she claims that she devotes her prime to her pupils, why does it not appear that their academic achievements are more central for her in her mission? Furthermore, why does
she put so much effort into creating a mere image, a scenery, of teaching, instead of actually doing her duty? Why all the effort of keeping up an image of teaching, since that seems to end in nothing but trouble, and the spying headmistress, who on top of that wants to get rid of Miss Brodie. How could this solution be the easiest, which would cause the smallest amount of psychological pressure?

Logically, playing this kind of game should mean taking a huge risks and putting the whole career at stake, which the author points out by letting us see how Miss Brodie is constantly on guard for visitors to her classroom from the grownup staff. Since all this theater must be much more exhausting than just doing your duties, the question remains; what is the motive for keeping up this facade? Why all this effort for creating an empty shell? However, the theater seems successful, since the girls believe in their teacher, no matter what; ”All the time they were under her influence she and her actions were outside the context of right and wrong” (Spark 86). But it remains to see what drives Miss Brodie.

Moreover, as is already indicated, Miss Brodie avoids socializing with the grownup staff at the school, with the exception of the two men working there, the art master Teddy Lloyd, and the singing master Gordon Lowther. However, Miss Brodie does not only keep her group of pupils tightly around her, but on top of that, she also tries to isolate them from the rest of the school, by not encouraging them to be involved in any group activities; ”It was impossible for them to escape from the Brodie set in the eyes of the school. Nominally, they were members of Holyrood, Argyll and Biggar, but it had been well known that the Brodie set had no team spirit, and did not care which house won the shield. They were not allowed to care” (Spark 111). Furthermore, Miss Brodie does not only invite the girls to supper or to tea every now and then, but she also confides in them in her struggle to keep the occupation as a teacher; ”I should like you girls to come to supper tomorrow night...I have to consult you about a new plot which is a foot to force me to resign” (Spark 9). Not only does Miss Brodie socialize with her students, but she also seems to have an eye for whom she could rely on; ”Miss Brodie had already selected her favourites, or rather those whom she could trust; or rather those whose parents she could trust not to lodge complaints about the more advanced or seditious aspects of her educational policy...” (Spark 26). Thus it seems that Miss Brodie tries to gain total control over the girls.
However, there is one exception among the girls in the group, Mary, who is repeatedly pointed out as a scapegoat. An example of this is when Miss Brodie catches her reading a comic book under her desk; "A comic paper’, said Mary. ’A comic paper, forsooth, how old are you?...Perceiving all eyes upon it she lifted it up from the basket, tore it beyond redemption, and put it back again”. However, instantly, after this power demonstration, Miss Brodie urges her class to listen to her; ”one’s prime is the moment you were born for” (Spark 12).

Furthermore, when the new girl arrives, with a somewhat dubious reputation, since she has been expelled from all the former schools that she has attended, Miss Brodie takes an interest in her and this girl is also a great admirer of Miss Brodie; ”one of her greatest admirers was the new girl called Joyce Emily Hammond who had been sent to Blaine School as a last hope, having been obliged to withdraw from a range of expensive schools...” (Spark 116). However, Miss Brodie inspires her to go to Spain and fight for Franco in the Spanish Civil War. Eventually the news arrives that she has died.

Furthermore, when the girls reach their teens and become sexually mature, the true nature of Miss Brodie’s ambitions slowly starts to become more and more obvious. As indicated, the girls’ maturing process gives an impetus to Miss Brodie’s creativity regarding her relation to her pupils. Accordingly, even if the narrative of the novel moves back and forth in time, the girls’ sexual development seems to be central to the plot in the novel.

The girls are around ten when the story starts, and this stage is colourfully illustrated when two of the girls, Sandy and Jenny, celebrate Sandy’s tenth birthday. In this episode the girls discuss grownup people around them, speculating whether they have had sex or not, and they also draw some conclusion from their parents actions; ”they have sexual intercourse,’ Jenny said. The little girls paused, because this was still a stupendous thought, and one which they had only lately lit upon; the very phrase and its meaning was new” (Spark 16). It seems that these prospects of adulthood are at the same time both frightening and fascinating, and when the girls mention the art master of their school, and the fact that his wife just has had a baby, their childish fascination is underlined with their reactions upon the mere thought of grown up sexuality; ”Mr Lloyd had a baby last week. He must have committed sex with his wife.’ This idea was easier to cope with and they laughed screamingly into their pink paper napkins” (17). In addition to that, the two girls discuss the possibility of Miss Brodie having had sex with
the dead fiancé she tells stories about for the girls at school; "Do you think Miss Brodie ever had sexual intercourse with Hugh?' said Jenny. ‘She would have had a baby, wouldn’t she?’ ‘I don’t know.’ ‘I don’t think they did anything like that,’ said Sandy. ‘Their love was above all that” (Spark 20). As earlier mentioned, this period, which expands from somewhere around the age of five until the onset of puberty, is according to Feist et al called the latency period. Moreover, Feist et al write "that Freud believed that, from the 4th or 5th year until puberty, both boys and girls usually, but not always, go through a period of dormant psychosexual development” (45). Moreover, the attitude towards sexuality in this period, due to suppression, for example from parents, or from society is followed by feelings of shame and morality, which we also can see from the girls’ reactions of the mere idea of grownups around them committing sexual acts. However, as is already indicated in this essay, in this period, it is common that children form groups and cliques (Feist 45). Accordingly, the circumstances in which Miss Brodie gathers her pupils around her, by inviting them for teas and suppers, by taking them to the theater, resembles this stage, since it seems that she tries to make the pupils become her friends as well as her clique. As we also have seen, she even confides in her pupils regarding her problems at work, where the headmaster would prefer to dismiss Miss Brodie from the school due to her questionable methods. Even during the classroom activities and the lessons, Miss Brodie mainly entertains the pupils instead of teaching them. By doing this it seems that she turns her classes into social events where the pupils certainly have fun, since they learn both about Miss Brodie’s lovelife and skincleansing, instead of grammar and algebra. Perhaps this is for Miss Brodie’s another way of securing her dicsiples’ loyalty, since in the presumed moralistic atmosphere of the 1930s, the access to a grownup woman’s lovelife must have been something extraordinary for young teenage girls. As is indicated by Feist et al, even if the psychological development continues all through a person’s life, sometimes the mere process of development could cause stress and anxiety for the individual. Accordingly, as earlier mentioned, Feist et al explain that "technically, fixation is the permanent attachment of the libido onto an earlier, more primitive stage of development” (Freud, 1917/1963: Feist 36). Thus it could be the case that the idea of taking the next step in this development becomes too threatening, and then the psyche, unconsciously for the individual, may strive to revert to an earlier stage, as could be the case of Miss Brodie, for example when she prefers to be around her pupils, since this might cause less
anxiety to her, than the demanding world of adults. It seems that Miss Brodie is attracted to the secure world of childhood, since there she could easier create a world that she could control, and which would thus exclusively suit her needs.

Moreover, when the girls reach an age around seventeen, and thus reach sexual maturity, Miss Brodie's interest in them takes a new direction. Even if she as before, spends time with them, she tentatively starts to suggest completely new prospects. Miss Brodie proposes to all the girls that they should pose for the art master, but she especially aims this idea to the girl Rose; "then the question of sitting for an artist, and Rose’s future as a model, and the necessity for Rose to realize the power she had within her, it was a gift and she an exception to all the rules, she was the exception that proved the rule" (Spark 110). Interestingly, even if Miss Brodie seems to be in love in the art master, she is in the same time obsessed by the idea of involving Rose in an affair with him;

Miss Brodie was too cautious to be more precise and Rose only half-guessed at Miss Brodie’s meaning, for she was at this time...becoming famous for sex among the schoolboys... Rose was greatly popular with these boys, which was the only reason why she was famed for sex, although she did not really talk about sex, far less indulge it. She did everything by instinct, she even listened to Miss Brodie as if she agreed with every word (Spark110).

Furthermore, according to Anna Freud, the reason for this kind of reaction is identifying in someone a desired feature. Thus it seems that Miss Brodie perceives this specific feature in the girl Rose, which is pointed out, as we can see in in the quote above, about how she possesses a certain power. Accordingly, since Rose is sought after by boys, she is the logical object for this mission; "Various factors determine the selection of the object in favour of whom instinctual impulses are surrendered. Possibly the perception of the prohibited impulse in another person is sufficient to suggest to the ego that there is an opportunity for projection” (141). Perhaps it could be the case that Miss Brodie secretly would envy the beauty and popularity of Rose, and thus revert aggressive emotions in positive feelings. Accordingly, Anna Freud states that ”in most cases the substitute has once been the source of envy” (141). However, it is indicated in Spark’s novel, that Miss Brodie could be perceived as insecure about her own attractiveness as a woman, and this is illustrated in a passage when the girl Sandy
watches her; "Miss Brodie’s brown eyes were fixed on the clouds, she looked beautiful and frail, and it occurred to Sandy that she had possibly renounced Teddy Lloyd only because she was aware that she could not keep up this beauty; it was a quality in her that came and went” (Spark 114). Nevertheless, this way of substitution might seem odd, but as earlier indicated, it could be the positive outcome of the combination of projection and identification. Logically, since the author creates a character, who obviously lives through others, in more or less parasitic ways, this phenomenon in itself is something that is commonly known. Accordingly, Anna Freud states that “jokes about match-making old maids’ and meddlesome onlookers for whom no stakes are too high are perennial. The surrender of one’s own wishes to another person and the attempt to secure their fulfillment thus vicariously are indeed comparable to the interest and pleasure with which one watches a game in which one has no stake oneself” (140). Anna Freud gives an example, where a girl, who had scruples of conscience about marrying herself, did all she could to encourage other’s relations and engagements (139). Thus, it may be suggested, that even if Miss Brodie renounces the love of Teddy Lloyd, in spite of herself, she is after all not sacrificing anything personally, since her wish will be fulfilled anyway, if she only manages to make the match between the girl Rose and the art master. In this way Miss Brodie could more or less enjoy the pleasures of a sexual relationship, however, as a mere spectator, but without taking any emotional risks herself, that could cause anxiety to her ego. Moreover, Miss Brodie’s reaction reminds of the example that Anna Freud gives, where a woman has no love life of her own, but takes interest in other people’s love-lives; “The repudiation of her own sexuality did not prevent her from taking an affectionate interest in the love-life of her women friends and colleagues” (A.Freud 135). Whatever the reason is, it seems that Miss Brodie prefers to live her love life by proxy, instead of putting anything at stake herself.

If we return to the meaning of the main character’s claim, that she would be devoting herself to her girls in her prime, this makes her professional choice and her work sound almost religious and thus seem untouchable. Still, as is already indicated, rather than putting effort in her pupils’ academic success, the true nature of Miss Brodie devotion gradually emerges. It seems that she only needs the girls in order to facilitate the next step of her own psychosexual development. Even if Miss Brodie is a grownup woman, it seems that she is fixated at an earlier developmental stage, where she has not
yet reached sexual maturity and this impedes her from taking the next step, at least mentally. Thus she needs her girls for letting her explore sexuality conveniently, without having to be involved herself, as when she says to one of the girls; "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” (Spark 120). In this way it seems that she tries to create a secure world, and avoid the unknown land of adulthood, which includes sexual maturity, moral rules, and adjustment to the prescribed rules of society. Accordingly, Barbara Engler states that; "Freud believed strongly that events in the past can influence the present. If the libido is prevented from obtaining optimal satisfaction during one or more of the stages because it has been unduly frustrated or overindulged, it may become fixated or arrested at that particular stage” (Engler 45). Thus, instead of approaching the man she loves herself, she finds a substitute for this in one of her girls, and this intricate procedure takes place in the unconscious of the human mind order to fulfill the impulses of the id and parallely satisfy the demands of the super-ego. As earlier mentioned, this is a defensive reaction, and according to Anna Freud this reaction is known as altruistic surrender. Anna Freud states that "this defensive process serves two purposes. On the one hand it enables the subject to take a friendly interest in the gratification of other people’s instincts and so, indirectly and in spite of the super-ego’s prohibition to gratify his own, while, on the other, it liberates the inhibited activity and aggression primarily designed to secure the fulfillment of wishes in their original relation to himself ” (140). Perhaps this so called sacrifice could in some way make Miss Brodie regard herself as generous and benevolent, but could it also make her in her own mind to be seen as the woman who really devotes herself to her pupils, and thus deserves more respect?

Feist et al ask where these impulses go, once they have found their way into the unconscious. The most common result of this process is that the impulses become altered, and that they eventually become expressed in disguised or displaced ways; "The disguise, of course, must be clever enough to deceived the ego” (Feist 35). This seems to fit into the characterization of Miss Brodie. In addition, according to Feist et al, the desire to stay at, or revert to, an earlier stage of development is as mentioned, explained with the defense mechanisms of fixation. Since the psychological growing might be stressful, the ego may desire to resort to a familiar stage (36). Thus, as already
indicated, in the way as children do, grownups may deny reality and thus form the world suiting their own needs.

However, since society by logical reasons demands that a teacher’s vocation is her pupil’s best, admitting or letting other people see that you would not put their interest in the first place would of course make it impossible to keep the situation as a teacher. And thus, if this is not the main goal, this urge must be well disguised. Thus it seems that Miss Brodie repeats, over and over again, in order to believe in this herself, how she is devoting her prime to her pupils. Thus, as mentioned, Feist et al explain that one other way in which a repressed emotion may enter the consciousness is by masking itself as the original impulse’s opposite, by “reaction formation. Reactive behaviour can be identified by its exaggerated character and by its obsessive form” (Freud, 1926/1959a: Feist 35). Miss Brodie’s repeated exclamations could be seen as exaggerated and obsessive, since there is something compulsive in the way she repeats them.

However, why is there an image of Mussolini pinned to the classroom wall, what could it represent? As well as projecting the own feelings of inferiority onto another person, Miss Brodie’s motive for having this picture could be a borrowing of qualities that she does not possess herself. Thus the opposite to projection is the defense mechanism of introjection; “whereby people incorporate positive qualities of another person into their own ego”. An example of this could be how a person introjects the mannerisms of someone else, in order to minimize feelings of inferiority;”People introject characteristics that they may see as valuable, and that will permit them to feel better about themselves” (Feist et al 37). Accordingly, Miss Brodie has this image of Mussolini, but it seems that what she admires above all with the Italian fascist leader are the formations in the parades; ”Here is a larger formation of Mussolini’s fascisti, it is a better view of them than that of last year’s picture. They are doing splendid things as I shall tell you later” (Spark 44). It should be noted, that since the novel is reflecting an Edinburgh from the 1930s, it could be assumed that Fascism does not symbolise what it would, if the story for example would have been set during the Second World War. However, the choice of Mussolini might rather be indicating on the one hand political naivety in the protagonist, but it may be there to give an echo of a military orderliness, and on the other hand, it seems that the image of Mussolini could be interpreted as a symbol of the power that Miss Brodie would need in order to be able to control her
world. Seen in this way, the admiration of parades and orderliness could be seen as reflecting a fixation, and what could point to this are Miss Brodie’s exaggerated reactions, when order is disturbed, especially by the clumsy girl Mary. Accordingly Feist et al state that "those who are obsessed with neatness and orderliness may possess an anal fixation” (36). Moreover, the image of the power that Mussolini as an exaggerated, archetypical masculine and aggressive symbol seems to constitute in this story, could be interpreted as an expression of penis-envy, where Miss Brodie tries to borrow the power that this image represents.

Moreover, since Miss Brodie constantly arranges the scenery for visits from the headmistress Miss Mackay, she seems to adjust her whole world in order not to be revealed. However, there is a motivated fear of loss, since if the headmistress would detect the true nature of the classroom activities, Miss Brodie would probably be dismissed from the school. However, this fear of loss reminds of castration anxiety in its nature, since Miss Brodie seems to have this fear as a constant condition. As earlier mentioned, Anna Freud writes about a boy who always wanted to wear a specific cap, in order to appear grownup. Later in life, as a man, this boy still had his anxiety, but changed the talisman that protected him; "At a later period in his life his desire for protection became less noticeable. He laid aside his rucksack and headgear and contented himself with carrying a stylo in his pocket” (90). According to Anna Freud, the pen in the man’s pocket protected his ego from his castration anxiety, which gave him feelings of inferiority. In a similar way, the image of Mussolini could thus be interpreted as serving as a protection for Miss Brodie’s ego.

Furthermore, there are features in Miss Brodie which remind of Charlie Chaplin’s portrayal of the protagonist in the film *The Dictator* from 1940. For example, in one scene the protagonist, the dictator, plays like a child with a gigantic balloon with the map of the world printed on it, tossing it high up in the air. Moreover, in the speeches in the film, when the dictator speaks to the crowds, he is portrayed to mechanically repeat phrases, and included in his speak are also randomly placed words, like "Wienerschnitzel" and "Sauerkraut”, seemingly placed there in order to make the character look as ridiculous as possible (Chaplin). Thus the assumption is that since the film is from 1940, it is not unlikely that this portrayal could also have affected Spark’s illustration of Miss Brodie. However, the author’s aim with this detail, the image of
Mussolini, might have been to point out the danger in the naive and uncritical reception of the teachings of someone, only because of that person’s appearance or charisma.

Even if Muriel Spark does not give any indications of Miss Brodie’s family or relatives, one ancestor is presented, of whom she also boasts proudly to the girls; ”I am a descendant, do not forget, of Willie Brodie, a man of substance, a cabinet maker and a designer of gibbets, a member of the Town Council of Edinburgh, and a keeper of two mistresses who bore him five children between them. Blood tells...he was a night burglar only for the danger of it.” (Spark 88). When a new girl arrives to the school, Joyce Emily, and is put in the care of Miss Brodie, and as is already mentioned, there is something mad about this girl. However, when Miss Brodie takes an interest in her, and she hears that her brother is in Spain, fighting for Franco, Miss Brodie encourages her to go there as well, and as we know, the girl gets killed. However, the explanation from a Freudian perspective could be that Miss Brodie saw in this girl something that ignited the reaction, and in her unconscious the id-impulse was formed beyond recognition from the super-ego’s demands and thus found its outlet. Something in Miss Brodie liked the idea of going to the Spanish civil war, but in this way, by sending someone else, she could safely watch life being played for her, without having to risk anything herself. However, the author Candia Williams writes in the introduction of Spark’s novel; ”for antecedent Dame Muriel has given Miss Brodie the name of the great Deacon Brodie, as a real figure in Edinburgh to this day as the Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde of Stevenson, minister in the daylight hours, highwayman by night” (Williams v). Thus it seems that Williams indicates that this echo of Deacon Brodie could be the allusion to an adventurous mind with dark and forbidden desires, to whom the ordinary life is not exciting enough. However, as is earlier mentioned by Feist et al, the introjection of a valuable feature in someone could ignite an idea to a creative solution for wish fulfillment, which probably could be the motive for inspiring the young girl to go and fight in the Spanish Civil War.

Eventually, all the girls model for the art master, and peculiarly, all the portraits of the girls have resemblance of Miss Brodie’s features; ”Teddy Lloyd’s passion for Jean Brodie was greatly in evidence in all the portraits he did of various members of the Brodie set. He did them in group during one summer term, wearing their panama hats each in a different way, each hat adorning, in a magical transfiguration, a different Jean Brodie under the forms of Rose, Sandy, Jenny, Mary, Monica and Eunice” (Spark 111).
When Miss Brodie hears about the portraits and that the girls in her set are modeling, she is pleased; "Has he invited any other girls from the school? - But Miss Brodie knew the answer. 'Oh no, only us.' 'That’s because you’re mine’, ‘said Miss Brodie, 'I mean of my stamp and cut, and I am in my prime” (97). Miss Brodie certainly devotes her prime to her girls, since she attempts to live her life through them, and as we can see, for a while she manages to reshape the world, in order to prevent her ego from anxiety.

In spite of all the claimed devotion, Miss Brodie actually never seems to pay any attention to the girls’ own interests or desires. Despite all the promises, despite all the culture and all social events, it turns out that almost everything about Miss Brodie is centered around her own desires and wishes.

**Conclusion**

At the surface this novel could be seen as an illustration of someone’s life lies, and how we refuse to see our own shortcomings, but instead choose to uphold a facade, in order not to reveal our true nature. The novel also seems to illustrate how self-deception could be much more difficult to maintain, than doing what is expected from us.

However, the conclusion is that the unconscious motives are a consequence of Miss Brodie’s anxiety ridden ego, where it could be interpreted that she suffers both from castration anxiety and penis envy, since it seems that she is constantly afraid of a loss, which results in her fear of the headmistress. However, it seems that she has reverted to an earlier stage in life, due to a fixation, caused by anxiety ridden stress reactions, where her ego mediates between her id and her super-ego in quite irrational and creative ways, which accordingly blur the contact with reality.

Furthermore, this loss of reality seems to be a consequence not only from fixation, but from the consequences from various other defense mechanisms, which result in reactions where Miss Brodie creates a world entirely to suit her own needs, only in order to protect her ego from extensive pressure. Thus the girls in her set only seem to serve as her facilitators, by serving as her clique, her facade but also in some cases as her substitutes.

Thus, as a result of repressive reactions and a denial of reality, Miss Brodie, in the manner of a child, attempts to invent a fantasy world, where she could reign without having to put anything at stake herself, by watching life as a play on theater.
This seems to be the explanation behind Miss Brodie’s odd and manipulative behavior and the meaning of her claim, that she devotes her prime to her girls.
Works cited


